DISCOURSES

ON

SEVERAL SUBJECTS,

PREACHED AT THE

CATHEDRAL CHURCH

OF

WINCHESTER.

By JAMES WEBSTER, B. D.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

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FIVE CAUSES

OF THE

SUDDEN PROPAGATION

OF

CHRISTIANITY

EXAMINED.

BRITISH MUSEUM

DISCOURSE I.

ISAIAH lx. 22.

A little one ſhall become a thouſand; and a ſmall one, a ſtrong nation: I, the Lord, will haſten it in his time.

IT muſt ever be expected, that a religion, which is derived from God, will meet with enemies and oppoſers. It's precepts cannot be made acceptable to the natural temper and diſpoſition of man; and muſt, therefore, of neceſſity give offence to thoſe, who are unwilling that their appetites and paſſions ſhould be put under any re-

ſtraint. They are ready, on all occaſions, to call in queſtion it's authority, and to ridicule and deſpiſe it's doctrines.

On this ground, the religion of Chriſt has, at all times, been a very fruitful ſubject of debate. Too often has it been called in queſtion by thoſe, who are unwilling to *believe*, what they are unwilling to *practice*: but never did it ſuffer a more bold and daring attack, than that which has been made by a late writer. He is not content to call in queſtion particular opinions and particular doctrines. Nothing leſs will ſatisfy him, than an utter extirpation of revealed religion, nothing leſs than to prove the goſpel of Chriſt a mere legendary fable, that began in fraud, and ended in falſhood.

There *have* been times, when it would have been an *affront* to a Chriſtian congregation to have even doubted of the truth of Chriſtianity; and it is to be hoped, that there are a great many *ſtill* amongſt us,

us, who do not want arguments to convince them of it's divine origin. Indeed, the proofs, which may be brought for it's ſupport and defence, are ſo unqueſtionable, that one would fancy it impoſſible for any one, who thinks at all, to doubt of it's truth and authenticity. The weak and feeble inſtruments by which it was propagated and eſtabliſhed, the miracles that were wrought by it's firſt profeſſors, the purity and excellence of it's doctrines, all conſpire to ſhew it's origin to be truly divine: but all theſe our adverſary is willing to reject, as mere trifles, as things of little moment or conſequence, as things that are entirely unneceſſary for the propagation of a new religion.

Let us ſee, then, what this bold oppoſer of Chriſtianity has to advance in his own behalf, let us conſider what grounds he has to build his opinions upon, what foundation there is for this flimſy phantom of a diſtempered brain. He is frank enough indeed to acknowledge, but not

without a jeſt, that miracles are the true and obvious cauſe of the ſudden propagation of the Goſpel; but, ſays he, let us examine, what *human cauſes* * conſpired to give ſuch a ſwift and rapid progreſs to Chriſtianity, and to ſpread its doctrines, in the ſpace of a few years, over a great part of the then known world.—It muſt be confeſſed, that our adverſary has, like a ſkilful warrior, directed his darts with great art and ingenuity; that he has, with much ſubtilty, ſought the enemy, and ſupported the fight; but by a little attention it will be no difficult matter to ſhew that all his ſhafts have been ſpent in vain; no hard taſk to point out and expoſe the fallacy of his reaſoning, and to diſcover at once both the weakneſs of his head, and the corruptions of his heart.

He has mentioned five Cauſes, which *he* thinks are fully ſufficient to account

* See Mr. Gibbon's Hiſtory of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, vol. 1. chap. xv. and xvi.

for

for the ſudden propagation of Chriſtianity, without having recourſe to any divine interpoſition whatever.

I. The *firſt* is the *zeal of the primitive Chriſtians againſt Idolatry*. This cauſe, upon a very ſlight examination, will be found to do little for his purpoſe. It only amounts to this, that the Chriſtians were *able* to make proſelytes, becauſe they were *willing:* but here it ſhould be remembered, that it is one thing to *attempt*, and another to *execute* a deſign. It will be readily granted, that the zeal and induſtry of the primitive Chriſtians did contribute in ſome degree to ſpread the faith; but was this all that was wanting for their ſucceſs under ſo difficult and ſo arduous a taſk? Was this the only requiſite neceſſary to effect ſo important a deſign? We all know, that innovations of every ſort are but ſlowly admitted, and eſpecially in matters of religion. The paſſions and prejudices of men always run ſtrongly in favour of antient cuſtoms and antient habits,

habits. Something more, then, was ſurely wanting than mere zeal and induſtry to ſpread a new religion in ſo wonderful a manner. Without that divine and inviſible power, by which "the ſick were "healed, and the dead were raiſed," the attempt would have been vain and fruitleſs. This it was which gained the underſtanding, and ſent conviction into the heart. Hence aroſe not only the *zeal* of the primitive Chriſtians, but the *converſion* of the Gentiles. This is the true and only rational account that can be given of their ſucceſs. This, and this alone, could engage the attention of mankind, and bring them over to embrace the doctrines of Chriſt.

But, in order to try and examine ſtill further the force of this argument, let us take a view of our own miſſionaries, in the wild and uncultivated parts of America, and ſee how they have ſucceeded in their attempts to bring over proſelytes to a new religion. *They* have uſually been men

men who have poſſeſſed many advantages, far ſuperior to the firſt teachers of Chriſtianity. Not like ignorant and illiterate fiſhermen and mechanics, *they* have had both art and eloquence to recommend and aſſiſt them in their pious undertakings; *they* have in ſome meaſure been armed for the conflict; and yet how widely different has been their ſucceſs to that of the firſt teachers of Chriſtianity. Inſtead of converting whole nations, they have ſcarcely been able to eſtabliſh a ſingle Chriſtian church.—*They* muſt know but little of human nature, who can think, that the world could ever be converted by *reaſon*.

It is farther affirmed by our adverſary, that the *intolerant ſpirit*, as it is called, of Chriſtianity, contributed greatly to ſpread the Goſpel; but the weakneſs of this argument will ſoon appear. Indeed, this ſpirit was ſo far from helping it forward, that it tended to retard it's motion, and to hinder it's progreſs. For, were

were not the proſelytes to Chriſtianity ſtrictly commanded to relinquiſh every other Deity, and to acknowledge one "God "the Father, and one Lord Jeſus Chriſt?" The Heathens would, no doubt, have readily admitted the divinity of Jeſus, but at the ſame time they were not willing to reject the authority of Jupiter. There were at this time at Rome, and in other parts of the Roman empire, an incredible number of Deities, whoſe power and authority were all equally acknowledged; and every perſon was allowed to profeſs his own opinions, and to worſhip his own God, without harm and without hazard. Was it poſſible, then, that this intolerant ſpirit of the firſt Chriſtians could help forward and ſtrengthen the Chriſtian cauſe? Was it not repugnant to the very nature of the Heathen religion? Conſider only what Chriſtianity required of it's votaries: They were enjoined, we know, to reject not only the authority of Jupiter, but of every other Heathen Deity whatever, and to acknowledge

ledge Jeſus alone as their Lord and Maſter: And was this a circumſtance likely to convert the Heathens? Was this an argument by which men could be prevailed upon to forſake the antient cuſtoms of their fathers, to relinquiſh the worſhip of thoſe Deities, to whom they had been long attached, and to profeſs a new religion? So wonderful a change could never have been produced without the moſt powerful motives; and what could theſe motives be, but a full and clear conviction, that the doctrines which were taught by the firſt publiſhers of Chriſtianity, were derived from him, who is King of Kings, and Lord of Lords.

It appears, then, that the zeal of the firſt Chriſtians, unſupported by miracles, was a very inſufficient cauſe of the progreſs of the Goſpel; and it appears too, that the intolerance of the Chriſtian religion muſt have been a real impediment to it's ſucceſs.

II. Let us proceed, then, to examine the ſecond cauſe aſſigned by our adverſary, namely, *the doctrine of a future ſtate*. He is of opinion, that Chriſtianity made it's way in the world, by giving a more *reaſonable* and a more *uſeful* repreſentation of this important ſubject, than any that was to be found among the refinements of the philoſophers, or in the fables of the prieſts and poets. It is true, the doctrine of a future ſtate was, at this time, but little underſtood; the beſt and wiſeſt philoſophers have delivered their opinions upon it with much darkneſs and uncertainty; and many of them inculcated to others much more than they themſelves believed. Was it not, then, reaſonably to be expected, that an opinion of this ſort, which was uſhered into the world under a pretence of divine authority, would be readily and joyfully embraced by the Heathen? There is ſomething in our very nature which prompts us to wiſh for, and expect an eternity to come; ſomething which inclines us to hope,

hope, that our exiſtence will be preſerved after death. To have no other proſpect than that of dying like the beaſt that periſheth, to think that we ſhall ſink into nothing, when we are delivered from this vale of miſery, is very humiliating; nor can the pride of man willingly ſubmit to ſuch a conſideration. All this ſhall be readily allowed: But what was the *nature* of that future life, which is promiſed in the Goſpel? What the *conditions*, upon which it is to be granted? Are we not forbidden to gratify our inclinations and paſſions, under the ſevereſt penalties? Are we not threatened with everlaſting puniſhments hereafter, unleſs we live "ſoberly, righ-"teouſly, and godly, in this preſent life?" This was a religion, not likely to be haſtily admitted. It's precepts were too hard, it's conditions too repugnant to the vicious habits and diſpoſitions of men. It promiſed indeed eternal life, but the ſituation of men in that life was to be widely different. "They that had done "good, were to go into life everlaſting;

"and

" and they that had done evil into ever-
" laſting fire." It may not alſo be fo-reign to our purpoſe to obſerve further, that beſides the ſeverity of it's precepts, the firſt proſelytes to Chriſtianity had many other dangers to apprehend. They were ſure to be perſecuted in a peculiar manner, on account of their religion, and they did on many accounts actually un-dergo the ſevereſt " trial of cruel mock-
" ings and ſcourgings. They were ſtoned,
" were ſawn aſunder, were ſlain with the
" ſword, they wandered about in ſheep
" ſkins, and goat ſkins, being deſtitute,
" afflicted, tormented." Theſe were the fruits, which the firſt profeſſors of Chriſ-tianity were to reap; theſe the ſuffer-ings, which they were to endure, who were willing to become the diſciples of Chriſt.

III. Let us now proceed to conſider the third Cauſe, which, as our adverſary affirms, ſerved to propagate and eſtabliſh Chriſtianity; and that is, the *pretenſion*

of

of it's firſt publiſhers to miraculous powers. Here we ſhall readily join iſſue with him. Undoubtedly miracles, or the appearance of miracles, were the true and obvious cauſe, by which the doctrines of Chriſt were ſpread throughout the world. Theſe were the undoubted marks of a divine interpoſition; theſe the chief inſtruments of converting the world. The only queſtion is, whether theſe miracles were *pretended* or *real*; if the former, I aſk, To what purpoſe was the pretence made? Men are not uſed to lye and to cheat, when they are ſure to ſuffer, not to gain, by the impoſture. Is it poſſible, that a ſet of men ſhould venture to engage in a cheat, and try to impoſe a new religion on the world, without any apparent benefit to themſelves? Is it likely, that they would renounce all the comforts of life, and expoſe themſelves to dangers, and even death itſelf, for the ſake of propagating a *lye*? No! they had higher and nobler pretenſions, whereon to ground their doctrines. "The blind received

"their

" their ſight, the lame walked, the lepers " were cleanſed, and the dead were raiſed " up." Theſe were the arguments, which gave full aſſurance to them and to others, that they were acting under the direction and authority of heaven, and that they were ſupported and encouraged by the hand of God.

What is ſaid of the *credulity* of the early Chriſtians, is nothing to the purpoſe. Can it be pretended, that the Jews and Heathens were credulous? Were they ſuch ſilly and weak perſons, as to be eaſily tricked into a new religion, without any ſolid proof, and in oppoſition to their prejudices and paſſions? On the contrary, did not they, on all occaſions, upbraid our Saviour " with his new doctrines, and call " him a babbler, and a ſetter-forth of " ſtrange Gods?" Did they not derid- " ingly tell him, that he " caſt out devils " by Beelzebub, the prince of devils?" This was a behaviour that could never be the reſult of too much credulity.—But let

let it be granted, that the firſt converts were ſuch *ſoft* and *eaſy* perſons, as to be readily impoſed upon, and willing to embrace every doctrine that was offered to their choice: Is it likely, that theſe perſons, who had been ſo eaſily deceived themſelves, were qualified to deceive others? Were *they* men of ſuch art and ingenuity, of ſuch wonderful dexterity, as to outwit both prieſts and philoſophers? The ſuppoſition is improbable in the higheſt degree, if they had no power from above.

IV. The fourth Cauſe which our adverſary has mentioned, and whereby the religion of Chriſt is ſaid to have made ſo ſtrange and ſwift a progreſs, is *Chriſtian Morals:* but neither could this cauſe contribute to the converſion of the Gentiles. Men are not ſo eaſily brought to ſubmit to ſtrict rules and ſevere diſcipline, are not ſo ſoon purſuaded to renounce their favourite vices, and to give up the gratifications of appetite and paſſion. It is true, they are

at all times ready to admire and applaud virtuous characters, and to acknowledge the reaſonableneſs and equity of religious precepts; but they have ever been unwilling to comply with the one, or to imitate the other. What is it that obſtructs the cauſe of Chriſtianity in our days? Is it not the corruption and degeneracy of human nature? Is it not the averſion they have to ſubmit to the ſevere diſcipline of religion, and to be interrupted in their progreſs in vice and wickedneſs? Human nature was the ſame then as now, and would therefore equally obſtruct the progreſs of the Goſpel.—But if the virtues of the firſt Chriſtians were ſo remarkably great, as our author thinks fit to repreſent them, may it not be aſked: *Why* were they virtuous? The anſwer is plain, becauſe they believed the Goſpel; and why did they believe it? This queſtion our adverſary has thought fit to leave unanſwered.—At other times, however, their virtues are forgotten, and the morals of the firſt Chriſtians are repreſented as fooliſhly or extravagantly auſtere.

If

If this repreſentation be true, we muſt own, that they miſtook their own religion; and no wonder, that they ſhould not fully comprehend at once the nature of all thoſe doctrines that were recommended to their choice. But will miſtakes of *doctrine* lead us to charge them with miſtakes of *fact?* They themſelves were, no doubt, convinced, that the religion which they had received was derived from God. The voluntary hardſhips, to which they on all occaſions ſubmitted; the dangers and difficulties, which they chearfully underwent; their ſteady perſeverance, and fixed reſolution, under the ſevereſt perſecution, and even under death itſelf, are all unqueſtionable proofs of their ſincerity.

V. The fifth and laſt Cauſe, which is ſaid to have eſtabliſhed Chriſtianity in the world, is *the nature and government of the firſt Chriſtian Churches:* Here our adverſary ſeems to have brought us into a field of action, where we have him to ſtill greater

advantage. He tells us, that in the earlier ages, men turned Chriſtians, that they might either partake in the oblations given to the poor, or that they might enjoy the honours and profits granted to the clergy. But how could theſe cauſes contribute to the original eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity? Chriſtians muſt firſt have been very numerous, muſt have already gained a conſiderable footing in the world, before their religion could make any material progreſs in either of theſe ways. In later times, perhaps, the hopes of ſharing in the diſtribution of goods, might induce the more indigent part of mankind to come over to the religion of Chriſt; and yet there were many motives to deter even *them* from a compliance of this ſort: For were not they, who embraced it, forbidden at all times to gratify their criminal inclinations and paſſions, and on many occaſions obliged to undergo the ſevereſt ſufferings? But what are we to ſay of thoſe, "who ſold their houſes and lands, "and brought the money, and laid it at

"the

" the Apoſtles feet." Were *they* influenced by alms and oblations? Did they wiſh to ſhare in the benefits and advantages of the church? On the contrary, we are told, " that the whole multitude of them that " believed, were of one heart, and of one " ſoul, neither ſaid any of them that " aught of the things which he poſſeſſed " were his own, but they had all things " common."

What is ſaid, too, of *excommunication* ſeems to be little or nothing to our preſent purpoſe. To be under the fear and apprehenſion of being thruſt out from the ſociety of Chriſtians, might indeed contribute to the ſupport and maintenance of Chriſtianity; but could never be a motive for embracing it. Would any one accept a new religion, and expoſe himſelf to the perſecution of his enemies, when he knew he was liable to be again excluded by his friends; and that too upon the ſlighteſt grounds, and for the moſt trifling offence?

In treating on the ſubject now before us, two queſtions ariſe, which ſhould be kept entirely diſtinct; for without this, it is impoſſible to bring our diſpute to a fair and juſt determination. The firſt is, Whether Chriſtianity, *after* it had ſpread thro' the whole Roman empire, could preſerve and perpetuate itſelf without any ſupernatural aid or aſſiſtance? The ſecond is, Whether it could begin at *firſt*, and *afterwards* extend itſelf thro' ſo many provinces, by human means *only?* Theſe two queſtions our adverſary has, with great pains and ingenuity, as *he* fancies, mixed and confounded together, in order to make his weak and flimſy arguments appear the more plauſible. Every one will allow, that when Chriſtianity had already eſtabliſhed itſelf in the world, and had great numbers on its ſide for its ſupport and defence, no ſupernatural aids could be wanting to preſerve and perpetuate it. But how did it begin at firſt, and afterwards ſpread itſelf through ſo many parts of the world? "The apparent cauſes and inſtruments

ſtruments of this wonderful change, we all know, were chiefly twelve men, of obſcure birth and parentage, of the meaneſt education, of the plaineſt and ſimpleſt underſtandings, unpoliſhed by learning, unaſſiſted by eloquence, and unimproved by experience and converſe. Men of no ſubtilty, no art, no addreſs, who had no manner of authority, intereſt, or repute in the world. Theſe men undertook to convince the world, that one *Jeſus*, a man who had juſt before expired publicly on the Croſs, was the true God, bleſſed for ever: And in conſequence of this, they began to preach up a new doctrine, the moſt unwelcome to fleſh and blood that could be, the moſt repugnant to men's natural inclinations and paſſions, to their ſettled habits and inveterate prejudices; contrary to the eſtabliſhed rites and religions of all countries, and in all ages of the world. They ſet out from Jeruſalem with this deſign; they diſperſe themſelves through all the quarters of the earth, they ſucceed every where, and in a very ſhort time,

prevail

prevail with great multitudes in every nation and kingdom to ſubmit to the laws and to own the religion of Jeſus." *

Nothing more can be wanting, ſurely, to convince every thinking man, that a divine and inviſible power attended theſe teachers in the exerciſe of their miniſtry, and that it was this alone which enabled them to ſpread and eſtabliſh the Goſpel in ſo wonderful a manner.

In our preſent debate we have hitherto confined ourſelves wholly to the five Cauſes, which I have been conſidering; but before we diſmiſs this ſubject, it will not be amiſs to take a more general view of the means employed by our adverſary for the ſupport of his favourite opinion, to obſerve what *ſhifts* he has made uſe of to ſtrengthen and help forward his impious deſigns! What evaſive arts and ſubtil contrivances

* Biſhop Atterbury.

to

to avoid the force of truth, and to diſhonour the religion of Chriſt! It is true, he has profeſſedly enlarged on no other topics than thoſe we have already examined; but, in a ſecret and covert manner, he has thrown out a variety of other hints, tending to the ſame purpoſe, and has diffuſed the venom of infidelity thro' his whole book. He is continually labouring to ſet off the idle tales of doating prieſts, and to dreſs up and give an air of probability to their ſtrange and whimſical ſtories. Nor does he always ſuffer theſe to eſcape from his hands unmutilated and uncorrupted. Their meaning he has often miſtaken, and ſometimes perverted, when it beſt ſuited his purpoſe: But had his deſigns been honeſt, had he been diſpoſed to have given a true and faithful account of ſuch crude and undigeſted matter, what have we to do with the idle fables and legendary ſtories of doating prieſts? Chriſtianity has no more to do with them, than light has to do with darkneſs. The word of God ſtandeth ſure. There is nothing like fable

ble in the hiſtory of the Goſpel: It is pure and uncorrupt, as the fountain from whence it flowed.

But the Chriſtian doctrines, tho' agreeable to the dictates of reaſon, and ſuggeſting the moſt pleaſing hopes, and delightful views, to every well-diſpoſed mind, our adverſary appears to reject with ſcorn, and has no other proſpect than that of ſinking into nothing.—Let us, then, leave him to his own gloomy and uncomfortable ſentiments, and, together with him, let us leave thoſe fooliſh and fanciful doctrines, of which he perpetually ſpeaks with ſo much favour and regard. The vanity and folly of the Pagan Theology, *he*, no doubt, perceives as well as *we*. But that there is a God few perſons, I hope, are hardy enough to deny; and why ſhould not that God reveal his will to mankind? Are we, whom he has ſet but a little lower than the angels, creatures that are beneath his notice? Are we deſigned for nothing more than to die like the brutes, whom

whom he hath placed ſo far beneath us? It cannot be. Our reaſon clearly points out to us, that we are made for ſomething farther; and revelation, if her voice might be heard, aſſures us, that God has given unto us a portion of his ſpirit, and that we are made for immortality. Let us, then, hold faſt the religion of Chriſt, as the only hope and comfort of our lives; let us profeſs it as good men and good Chriſtians; let us joyfully embrace every opportunity of teſtifying our gratitude to God, for the benefit of his word, and the revelation of his will.

ON THE

RISE, PROGRESS,

AND

DOCTRINES

OF

METHODISM.

DISCOURSE II.

EZEKIEL, xiii. 3, 6.

Wo unto the fooliſh Prophets, that follow their own ſpirit, and have ſeen nothing! They have ſeen vanity and lying divination, ſaying, the Lord ſaith; and the Lord hath not ſent them.

IT appears, my brethren, from theſe words of Ezekiel, that, in his days, there were many falſe teachers and falſe prophets, who pretended to have received the true ſpirit of prophecy, and thereby endeavoured to bring into contempt the opinions and ſentiments of thoſe prophets, who were really

really commiſſioned by God to teach his will to mankind. Theſe falſe teachers, aſſuming a pious and religious behaviour, impoſed upon men, and prevailed upon them to receive their fooliſh and abſurd doctrines as the ſure and infallible word of God. It cannot be denied, that it is our lot, alſo, to live in an age, wherein there are teachers of religion, who pretend to have received an authority, to which they have no title. They teach men ſuch doctrines as cannot poſſibly be juſtified from any word of ſcripture. They oppoſe themſelves to the parochial clergy, as if they alone were able to adminiſter proper ſpiritual food to their hearers, and aſſume to themſelves a power and authority, which is little leſs than that of Chriſt.—You will eaſily gueſs, my brethren, that the teachers of religion whom I mean here to point at, are the ſect of Chriſtians called Methodiſts.

It is unaccountably ſtrange, that the religion of Chriſt, which is ſo plain and ſimple

ſimple in its own nature, ſhould ever have been perverted in the manner it has, by the paſſions and prejudices of men: The true meaning of Scripture has been ſo much abuſed, that there is no opinion, however abſurd, which has not been maintained by religious diſputants.

Far be it from me, that I ſhould in this place preſume to cenſure any ſect of Chriſtians, becauſe they differ from us in religious ſentiments, and have choſen a different way to ſalvation: Rather ought we to conſider every thing that has the appearance of piety and devotion, in the moſt favourable light that can be. I do not blame any one for maintaining thoſe doctrines in religion, which he, in his own conſcience, thinks to be right, and conformable to truth. At the ſame time, give me leave to examine fairly and impartially, whether thoſe perſons, who call themſelves Methodiſts, have truth and reaſon on their ſide or not; whether they have a juſt title to that ſpiritual authority,

which they ſeem to claim above other Chriſtian ſects.

If I were to trace the hiſtory of Methodiſm from its firſt riſe and origin, I ſhould begin at a period ſo remote as the year 1541, when John Calvin, a Biſhop of Geneva, * firſt taught the doctrine of predeſtination, or, as it is ſometimes called, election and reprobation: In this doctrine it is maintained, that God, from the foundation of the world, has predeſtinated one part of mankind to everlaſting happineſs, and the other to eternal miſery. This doctrine, notwithſtanding the great folly and abſurdity of it, ſpread itſelf over many parts of Europe, and particularly in this kingdom. It was at this time that Methodiſm began to take root in the world; for the doctrine of election and reprobation is, at this day, the very ground-work of that perſuaſion. I cannot in a ſingle diſcourſe repreſent to you, as fully as I

* See Moſheim's Eccleſ. Hiſt. Part 2, cap. 2, § vii.

could

could wiſh, the progreſs of this doctrine; the debates and diſſentions which it produced; the heat and violence with which they were carried on: Theſe, and many other things of the like kind, might here have been advanced, as the unhappy fruits of this doctrine: But I will leave this period of hiſtory, and ſtep on to more modern times, when we ſhall ſee Methodiſm in a truer and more genuine light, as it is now profeſſed.

The firſt time, in which the ſect of Methodiſts began to gain any conſiderable footing in this kingdom, was in the year 1729, that is about 57 years ago; when a ſet of young men at Oxford, ſtudents of that Univerſity, agreed to aſſemble frequently together, in order to diſcourſe on religious ſubjects.† Of this number, the celebrated George Whitfield was one.—Theſe young men, pleaſed with this new

† See a Pamphlet called the Oxford Methodiſts; publiſhed in 1738.

mode of religious edification, were ſoon deſirous of making the benefit of their inſtructions more general; and for that end, began to travel abroad into the world. One went to viſit the ſick, and expounded the ſcriptures to him: Another went and preached to the poor captive in the dungeon; and all were daily and hourly employed, in what they called their new religious office. Theſe young men ſoon attracted the notice of the world, (for novelty never wants its admirers). Their imaginations began to be heated, and they ſoon became ſuch enthuſiaſts in religion, as to fancy, that they were peculiarly choſen by God to inſtruct the people in religious knowledge; they fancied, that they felt the Spirit of God working within them, which forced them, as it were, to go and to preach the Goſpel. It cannot be denied, that the deſign of theſe young men was laudable, but ſurely their underſtandings were weak; for will any one in his ſober ſenſes, at this day, affirm, that the Spirit of God is upon him, and

that

that he is actually appointed by the Deity to be a guide to eternal ſalvation.

Having given you this ſhort hiſtory of Methodiſm, I will now beg leave to examine ſome of the principal doctrines which it contains. I before obſerved to you, that the doctrine of election and reprobation is the very ground-work of that perſuaſion. The Methodiſts ſay, in the words of St. Paul, that "God hath choſen us, "before the foundation of the world, that "we ſhould be holy and without blame; "having predeſtinated us unto the adop-"tion of children by Jeſus Chriſt, accord-"ing to the good pleaſure of his will."* From this, and other paſſages of a like nature, they conclude, that one part of mankind were ordained from the foundation of the world to be the favourites of Heaven; and the other were doomed to eternal miſery. I will not take upon me to refute this opinion: It is too abſurd and im-

* Epheſ. i. 4.

pious

pious to want any refutation; for can it poſſibly be imagined, that the great Author of Nature, whoſe tender mercies are over all his works, ſhould ever deal *ſo* with his creatures, as to ordain ſome to happineſs, and others to miſery, without any free-will of their own, without any regard to their behaviour? If this were the caſe, what authority have we to believe in the moral attributes of the Deity? Where is his juſtice or his mercy? What ground have we to hope, that by patient continuance in well doing, we ſhall reap glory and honour and immortality? On this ſuppoſition every moral precept is aboliſhed, every religious principle is deſtroyed; for there can be no religion where there is no freedom of choice.

But let us admit, that this doctrine of election and reprobation is true. I will then aſk, how do *you*, who are Methodiſts, diſcern that you are choſen from the foundation of the world to be the favourites of Heaven? for you certainly profeſs to be greater

greater favourites than other men. Your anſwer is, you have an experimental knowledge, that you are guided in all your actions by an irreſiſtible influence of the Holy Spirit. You feel it within you; you perceive it to be a ſenſible operation, an operation which may be diſcerned, as if the hand of God were upon you, overpowering the ſoul; and it is this experimental knowledge that marks you out to be the favourites of Heaven. This is the great and diſtinguiſhing proof, whereby you are convinced of the abſolute certainty of your own ſalvation, and without this knowledge, no one, according to your opinion, can be in a ſavable ſtate.—A hard and uncharitable ſentiment this, truly, to ſuppoſe, that all men muſt be doomed to utter deſtruction, who do not feel what you feel.

But at what time, I aſk, does this influence of the Holy Spirit begin to operate? You ſay, at the new-birth: Do the ſcriptures any where affirm, that the Holy Spirit of God ever ſenſibly operates upon the mind? Our

Our Saviour has expreſſly told us the contrary. "The wind bloweth where it "liſteth, and thou heareth the ſound "thereof, but canſt not tell whence it "cometh, and whither it goeth; ſo is every "one, that is born of the Spirit." † We of the eſtabliſhed church are bound to believe, that we are in a certain degree under the the guidance and influence of the Holy Spirit; that he helpeth our infirmities, and both diſpoſeth and enableth us to do the will of our Heavenly Father. We learn this from our Saviour's own declaration; he has told us, that "we are quickened "by the Spirit, and are led by the Spirit, "and if we pray to God for his Holy Spi-"rit, he is always ready to give it to them "that aſk it." But he never refers men to their inward feelings and experience to know, whether they are under the influence of the Holy Spirit, nor can we poſſibly tell from whence this influence really ariſeth, by the manner in which it affects

† John iii. 8.

and

and moves us; we cannot poſſibly be aſſured by any thing we feel within ourſelves, that it cometh from God: It can only be diſcerned by its fruits and effects, which appear in the lives of pious and good Chriſtians.

Is not the miſtake into which you are led, on this occaſion, owing chiefly to the want of diſtinguiſhing properly between the ordinary and the extraordinary operations of the Spirit of God? The extraordinary operations were thoſe, by which the Apoſtles and firſt Chriſtians were enabled to work miracles, as a proof of their divine miſſion. This power was abſolutely neceſſary in the firſt ages of the church, for the propagation and eſtabliſhment of Chriſtianity; "but the viſion and the pro-" pheſy is now ſealed," and the ordinary gifts and influences of the Spirit, which ſtill continue, are conveyed in quite a different manner, and for ends and uſes of a more private nature.

Men often think, that they feel the Spirit, when they feel nothing but the workings of their own paſſions, and are led on by the craſy fancies of a diſtempered brain. When the imagination is once heated, there is nothing which we cannot be prevailed upon to adopt. Such and ſo great is the folly and infatuation of an enthuſiaſtic turn of mind.

It is obſerved, that many of your perſuaſion have taken frequent occaſions to find fault with our public liturgy, as if it were much wanting and very defective in regard to the doctrines of regeneration or a new birth; but ſurely this charge is as groundleſs, as it is impertinent; for examine, I beſeech you, the daily ſervice of our church, our collects, our litany, our form of baptiſm, our office for confirmation, and ſee, whether we do not frequently call upon God for the guidance of his Holy Spirit. Do we not again and again pray, that he will endue us with the grace of his Holy Spirit? that by his holy inſpiration,

ration we may think thoſe things that be good, and by his merciful guiding may perform the ſame? We are authoriſed to do this from numberleſs paſſages in the New Teſtament. Regeneration or a new-birth, as it is wrought by the Spirit, is that which we receive at our firſt entrance into the Chriſtian covenant. St. Paul tells us, "that according to his mercy he ſaveth us "by the waſhing of regeneration and renew-"ing of the Holy Ghoſt;"* and it is our Saviour's expreſs declaration, "that except "a man be born again, he cannot ſee the kingdom of God:" †—Born again he muſt "be; he muſt put off the old man with the "affections and luſts, and muſt put on the "new man, which is created after righte-"ouſneſs and true holineſs." This is the only juſt ſenſe, in which a man can be ſaid to be born again. Agreeably to this ſentiment, St. Paul tells his converts: "Ye were "ſometimes darkneſs, but now are ye

* Titus iii. 5.
† John iii. 3.

"light

" light in the Lord; by ſubmitting to the " pure precepts of the Goſpel, ye are " waſhed, ye are ſanctified, ye are juſtified " in the name of the Lord Jeſus, and by " the ſpirit of our God."

Another dangerous miſtake, into which you have fallen, is an opinion, that " you " are juſtified by faith alone." This is ſo palpable an error, that there is no need, I think, to ſpend much time in confuting it; for is any one, in this aſſembly, abſurd enough to fancy, that the ſoundeſt faith, and the pureſt worſhip, can poſſibly avail us any thing in the ſight of God, without a ſober and a virtuous life? If we attend at all to the words of ſcripture, we cannot ſurely believe this.—Has not our Saviour, in every page of the New Teſtament, enjoined us to perform good works? And if they are enjoined, are they not neceſſary? And if they are neceſſary, how can we be juſtified without them! If a bare ſpeculative faith alone were ſufficient to ſave us, to what purpoſe were all thoſe excellent

excellent moral precepts given us, which our bleſſed maſter has endeavoured, on all occaſions, to inculcate with ſo much earneſtneſs. It is true, that faith in Jeſus Chriſt is an eſſential part of our religion, and it ſhould be an eſſential part of our care to preſerve it pure and uncorrupt; but this ſurely is not the whole of what is expected from us. This was intended only to be ſubſervient to a much higher end, the reformation of our manners, and the improvement of our virtue. Without this, faith is dead, and our religion is vain and fruitleſs: Thoſe who wiſh to do credit to the Goſpel of Chriſt, muſt ſhew that they are the better for it; muſt ſhew, in their lives and actions, that they are purified from the corruptions of the fleſh, and walk in godlineſs and honeſty. Indeed, the inſufficiency of faith without works appears from the whole tenor of the New Teſtament. Has not St. James aſſured us, that "as the body without the ſpirit "is dead, ſo faith without works is dead "alſo?"

"alſo?"* Has not he told us, "that if "ye have faith, ſo that ye could remove "mountains, and have not charity, ye are "nothing worth?"† Have not charity, that is, have not a kind and benevolent heart, a heart always open to works of piety and beneficence, to acts of juſtice and humanity. "Ye ſee, then, how that by works a man "is juſtified, and not by faith only."‡

The errors of the Methodiſts, as of other Chriſtian ſects, ariſe from a miſinterpretation of ſcripture. In the inſtance before us, they have entirely miſtaken the mean-

* St. James ii. 26.

† 1 Cor. xiii. 2.

‡ St. James ii. 24.

This account of faith and works, which is here given by St. James, ſeems to contradict many paſſages in the writings of St. Paul; for inſtance, when he tells us that we are *juſtified by faith alone*: And yet if we examine narrowly this ſubject, we ſhall eaſily diſcern, that by the word *faith*, St. Paul and St. James mean exactly the ſame thing. Their manner of expreſſion, it is true, is very different, but their meaning is obviouſly the ſame. See this ſubject conſidered at large, and in a very accurate manner, by Biſhop Blackall, in a ſermon preached at St. Mary's in Cambridge, June 30, 1700. Sermon xi. p. 337.

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ing of the word *faith*. Wherever St. Paul makes uſe of that word, he does not mean a bare ſpeculative faith; he means the Goſpel of Chriſt itſelf. This is the great bulwark of our ſalvation, and the hope of our calling; and if we continue in its precepts, and follow its doctrines, we ſhall undoubtedly be ſaved: By it we are placed in the way of ſalvation; are put into that ſtate and condition, in which if we continue, grounded and ſettled in the faith, we ſhall certainly receive our reward: And leſt any man ſhould be tempted to imagine, that we may be ſaved without good works, the Apoſtle expreſſly tells us, "that we are created in Chriſt Jeſus to "good works, which God hath ordained, "that we ſhould walk in them."

There is one thing in the conduct of *you*, who are Methodiſts, which I muſt not here paſs by, and which, I think, cannot be reconciled to fair and ingenuous dealing, and that is, your endeavour to juſtify your own extraordinary methods of teaching,

ing, by caſting unworthy reflections upon the parochial clergy, as if they were deficient in the diſcharge of their duty, and did not inſtruct their hearers in the true doctrines of Chriſtianity. You particularly accuſe them of neglecting to preach about regeneration or the new-birth, and from thence you alledge the abſolute neceſſity you are under of ſeeking for a more ſpiritual ſervice. I have converſed, ſays George Whitfield, with ſeveral of the beſt of your denomination, many of whom ſolemnly proteſted, that they went from the church becauſe they could not find food for their ſouls; they ſtayed amongſt us, till they were ſtarved out. And I am perſuaded, ſays he, that they would every where be willing to hear, if the Miniſters were ready to teach the truth, as it is in Jeſus. *— This is ſurely a moſt formidable charge againſt the eſtabliſhed church; but I truſt it is as groundleſs as it is formidable; for will any one with confidence affirm, that

* Whitfield's Journal, part iii. p. 75.

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the parochial clergy do not preach and maintain the doctrine of regeneration, or the new birth, as far as it is conformable to ſcripture, and as often as thoſe ſeaſons occur which the church has dedicated to that purpoſe? It is true, they do not, like *you*, talk in a high and lofty ſtrain of the pangs that attend the new birth; for as they are unable to deduce any ſuch thing, either from ſcripture, from reaſon or experience, ſo they are unwilling to take your bare word for it, without better evidence.

I will take upon me to ſay, in behalf of the eſtabliſhed clergy, that they are for the moſt part qualified, in a peculiar manner, to inſtruct their congregations in Chriſtian knowledge. The education which they have received, the leiſure and opportunity which they enjoy for ſtudy and contemplation, enable them to do this with benefit and advantage. If their hearers fail in the diſcharge of their duty, it is their own fault. How many admirable

diſcourſes are daily delivered by them, I need not ſay, wherein both the duties of morality, and the doctrines of Chriſtianity, are ſet forth in the ſtrongeſt light poſſible! How many volumes of ſermons have been publiſhed for the private benefit of all Chriſtians, which will do honour to their reſpective authors, ſo long as either learning or philoſophy ſhall remain! Read the works of Barrow, Clarke, Tillotſon, and judge for yourſelves, whether there is any juſt ground of complaint for want of ſpiritual food for your ſouls; whether there is any real cauſe to affirm, that our miniſters are not ready to teach the truth, as it is in Jeſus.

I am here aware, that many of you are always ready to prefer the crude and undigeſted effuſions of an illiterate mechanic to the beſt and moſt rational diſcourſe of a parochial miniſter: Why you ſhould do this, it is no eaſy matter to determine; unleſs you are more inclined to liſten to inſtructions, as you often do, in the open air,

air, than in a place dedicated to divine worſhip. Is there any thing in the offices and ſervices of our church which you can poſſibly diſapprove? Or rather, are they not conducted, in all reſpects, with the pureſt propriety and decorum? In them there are no vain and confident boaſtings; no raſh and uncharitable cenſures; no reprobation of thoſe who differ from us in religious ſentiments. We never diſturb the public peace by gathering together a tumultuous aſſembly, under the pretence of religious edification. We never preſume to ſet at nought all rule and all authority; never encourage the poor labourer to deſert the duties of his ſtation, and to go in queſt of ſpiritual food, to the great neglect and injury of his family: And yet theſe are the unhappy fruits of that ſpirit, by which *you* pretend to be guided. Theſe are the effects of that religious zeal, which has carried you beyond all the bounds of decency and decorum.

I fear I have already treſpaſſed too much upon your time, but I cannot cloſe this diſcourſe without taking notice of the ſtrange and unaccountable conduct of that great patron and advocate for your religion, the late celebrated George Whitfield, as it may be collected from his own Journal, which he kept of his preaching and travels, and which probably many of you have read. We there learn, that miracles and propheſies, and extraordinary communications with God, were as familiar to him, during his whole miniſtry, as if he had been the very chiefeſt Apoſtle of Chriſt. At one time he tells his hearers, that God had called him, and he muſt away.* At other times he informs them, that God had aſſiſted him much to talk clearly of the new birth, and juſtification by faith alone.† And on all occaſions, he ſpeaks of ſudden and ſurprizing effects, as wrought by the Holy Ghoſt in conſequence of his preaching

* Journal, part ii. p. 9.
† Ibid, part iii. p. 8.

and

and travels.* Will any one now deny, that the perſon who holds ſuch language, and aſſumes ſuch a character, deſerves to be called by any other name than that of a down-right enthuſiaſt, or an *impoſtor?* for ſo I ſhould have called him, if ſome reverence were not always due to the aſhes of the dead; and let me tell you, there is a wide difference between an enthuſiaſt and an impoſtor; for the former is only deceived himſelf, whilſt the latter endeavours to deceive others: And if he had not been an impoſtor, why ſhould he, who pretended to be led by the ſpirit into all truth, be led at the ſame time into all manner of prevarication and hypocriſy; as appears from almoſt every page of his writings.

* If it ſhould be alledged in favour of you, and your teachers, that you are good men and mean well: I anſwer, that good and well-meaning men do frequently de-

* Journal, part i. p. 25.

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ceive both themſelves and others, and in no inſtance ſo often as in that of religious zeal and tranſport. Had ſome of you, who are now teachers of religion, continued in your own proper capacity, you might have remained for ever amongſt the reſt of mankind unnoticed and unregarded; but now, being placed at the head of a ſect, you become ſignificant in your little ſphere, and poſſeſs an authority which you would otherwiſe have never obtained;—and it is well known, that when once men begin to be opinionated of themſelves, and to be fond of their own conceits, they are very apt to break out into the groſſeſt abſurdities, and to run into every innovation that can be deviſed.

To you, then, who pretend to be led by the Spirit of God, let me give this plain and friendly advice. Loſe no time to relinquiſh ſuch a fooliſh and fanciful imagination, and be not carried away with every wind of doctrine; but attend punctually, on every ſabbath day, to the duties of

of your reſpective pariſh churches, and liſten to the inſtructions and admonitions of your own proper miniſters, who are both *able* and *willing* to teach you the true principles of Chriſtian knowledge. At other times let nothing hinder you from diſcharging faithfully the proper duties of your ſtation. Conduct yourſelves at all times with diligence and induſtry, with honeſty and ſobriety: Then ſhall you not fail to be bleſſed with the comforts of God's Holy Spirit in this life, and to be finally rewarded in the world to come with life everlaſting.

ON THE

OBSCURITY

AND

IMPERFECTION

OF

RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE.

DISCOURSE III.

PSALMS, XCVII. 2.

Clouds and darkneſs are round about him.

THERE is no truth more clear and determined, than the exiſtence of a God, and yet nothing is more dark and diſputable than his nature, counſels, and operations, When we begin to inveſtigate the divine nature in *any* inſtance, we are led into numberleſs ſubtilties, are loſt in endleſs difficulties. Both the works and the ways

ways of God are full of myſtery. In the material world, innumerable events every where occur, which puzzle and perplex us to the uttermoſt. How is our imagination loſt in wonder and amazement, when we view the heavens and enquire in what manner thoſe vaſt bodies, which we behold, were at firſt called into exiſtence; how they were arranged in ſuch exquiſite order, and how they are regulated and preſerved! Even in thoſe parts of nature, where our knowledge ſeems to be moſt perfect, innumerable difficulties ariſe, which we cannot reſolve. "Of our own exiſtence, and of the vital union of ſoul and body, we cannot doubt; but who can explain what is the ſpring of life, or the principle of motion and activity within us? Who can ſay, by what laws ſpirit and matter are joined together, or by what contact a material and an immaterial ſubſtance reciprocally act upon each other? Nay! there is not a ſingle production in nature, which does not baffle and diſappoint our eagereſt enquiries. The moſt common and familiar

objects

objects of ſenſe; the moſt contemptible worm or weed that we tread under our feet, if we attempt to inveſtigate it's ſecret qualities, preſents to us obſtacles which we cannot ſurmount, and difficulties which we cannot reſolve. We ſee, as it were, only the ſurface of things. We gueſs a little, underſtand leſs, and compleatly comprehend nothing."

If, then, we cannot underſtand the material world, or the moſt common and familiar objects of ſenſe, how can we expect to comprehend ſpiritual things? If every part of nature's works is full of myſtery, why ſhould we imagine that religious truths ſhould be level to our narrow capacities, why ſhould we ſuppoſe that revelation, which treats of the nature, counſels, and diſpenſations of God, ſhould be exempt from the moſt inexplicable difficulties.

It is my deſign, then, at this time to ſhew the obſcurity and imperfection of our religious knowledge, both natural and revealed.

vealed. This will appear in a great variety of inſtances; and I will firſt examine how far this truth holds good in natural religion.

I. The difficulty of comprehending natural religion will evidently appear, if we take a ſlight view of the opinions and ſentiments of ſome of the beſt and wiſeſt philoſophers of old on that ſubject. *They* were men who lived in an age diſtinguiſhed above all others for learning and knowledge, were men of the profoundeſt erudition and the moſt acute apprehenſion; and yet how little were they able to underſtand concerning the true nature of God and religion. Read the philoſophical works of Cicero, and ſee how erroneous and defective were their judgments upon the plaineſt and ſimpleſt points. Conſult the treatiſes of Ariſtotle, Plutarch, and Seneca, and ſee into what endleſs mazes of error they have run in their ſearch after truth. How monſtrous was their religion! How abſurd their opinions! How impious their doctrines!

doctrines! Even the very firſt principle of all religion, the exiſtence of a God, was diſputed by many. Not willing to attribute the origin of the world to it's real and juſt cauſe, they fooliſhly imagined that it was the effect of chance, the reſult of a few wandering atoms, which by ſome ſtrange and unaccountable accident had haſtily come together, and taken their reſpective poſts in that exquiſite order in which they now appear. *Others* acknowleged indeed the exiſtence, but rejected the unity of God: And what were their Gods but a ſet of deified heroes, who had been ſlain in battle, perhaps in defence of their liberty and laws? And *all*, or nearly all, diſbelieved the doctrine of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments. This opinion, it is true, ſeems to be contradicted by a variety of paſſages in the writings of the old philoſophers; but let thoſe who diſpute this point, examine their works with accuracy, and they will ſoon diſcover the truth of this aſſertion; eſpecially if it be conſidered, that the ancient philoſophers were

were ſometimes diſhoneſt enough to teach to others much more than they themſelves were willing to believe.* Such and ſo dark and uncertain were the opinions which the ancient philoſophers were able to form of natural religion.

II. Let us examine in the next place, what ſentiments men have formed on this ſubject in our own times; but in doing this, I fear we ſhall ſtill meet with much doubt and difficulty; for is there a ſingle point in natural religion, about which men are at this day unanimouſly agreed? Is there a ſingle point, on which they have not held the moſt contradictory and op-oppoſite opinions? Are we not at this

* Biſhop Warburton has *clearly* ſhewn, in his Divine Legation of Moſes, that none of the ancient philoſophers believed the doctrine of a future ſtate of rewards and puniſhments, though, on account of it's confeſſed neceſſity to the ſupport of religion, and conſequently of civil ſociety, all the theiſtical philoſophers taught it with much care and aſſiduity to the people. See this ſubject treated at large in his Divine Legat. part ii. book iii. ſect. 2. 3.

moment

moment diſputing, whether the Deity is a benevolent or a malevolent Being? Are we not diſputing, whether moral or poſitive injunctions are of higher obligation? Are we not diſputing, whether there is any ſuch thing as an eternal Rule of Right? How many treatiſes have been written on the nature of virtue, I need not ſay, and how inconſiſtent are they all with each other! Theſe indeed are many of them productions which will ever hold a diſtinguiſhed place in the annals of literature. The names of Hutcheſon, Wollaſton, Butler, Locke, will ever be had in the higheſt veneration ſo long as the veſtiges of learning ſhall remain: And yet how little are we able to collect from all their reaſonings reſpecting the ways of God's Providence. Their works are often little better than a heap of words, without any ſolid meaning at all. Even the attributes of the Deity are but little underſtood by us, notwithſtanding the very acute reaſonings of a learned divine on that ſub-

ject.* What idea can we poſſibly form of the eternity, the immenſity, the omnipotence, the omniſcience, the omnipreſence, or the juſtice and the mercy of the Supreme Being. Theſe are matters far above the reach of human reaſon, and of which we are capable of knowing little or nothing.

Will any one ſtill affirm, that religious truths are eaſy to be underſtood by a willing mind? Or rather, will any one, or can any one deny, that they are wrapped up in obſcurity, and environed with difficulty? It is in vain that we attempt "to "find out the Almighty to perfection. "Clouds and darkneſs are round about "him. His way is in the ſea, and his "paths in the great waters, and his foot-"ſteps are not known."

III. But there are ſome events in the moral world, which ſhew the darkneſs and

* Dr. Clarke on the Being and Attributes of God.

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imperfection of natural religion in a yet ſtronger light; events which have ever ſtaggered the underſtandings of the wiſeſt of men to the uttermoſt, and againſt which they have been able to plead nothing but their own ignorance.

In contemplating our moral nature, we evidently diſcern that God is dealing with us in the character of a righteous Governor; but in the exerciſe of this government many difficulties ariſe, which ſeem to be totally inconſiſtent with the conduct of *him*, "who," we are told, "is good to all, "and whoſe tender mercies are over all "his works." How is this doctrine to be reconciled with his treatment of his creatures in every inſtance? Can any thing be more inexplicable than the *Origin of Evil?* That an infinitely wiſe and good God ſhould have formed us, ſubject to ſuch a variety of unavoidable miſeries, ſeems to be totally incompatible both with his wiſdom and his juſtice. Might we not here fairly object, and ſay to the Almighty,

"Why haſt thou made me thus?" We are formed of ſuch weak and frail materials, are made liable to ſo many miſcarriages, are placed in ſo dangerous a ſituation, that we ſtand, as it were, upon the very brink of our ruin; are doomed to deſtruction from the very frame and conſtitution of our being. By our natural infirmities and acquired misfortunes we often become ſuch a burden both to ourſelves and to ſociety, that it would have been better if we had never been born. "But, "good God! why doſt thou ſuffer theſe "hardſhips in a world which thou haſt "made? Is it for thy honour, that he, "whom thou haſt created after thy own "image and ſimilitude, ſhould be made "liable to ſo many ſufferings? Is it for "thy honour, that he, to whom thou haſt "communicated a portion of thy divine "nature, ſhould be placed in ſo perilous "a ſtate? Is it for thy glory, O God! that "ſo large a ſhade of miſery ſhould be "ſpread acroſs thy works? Or is it, that "we ſee but a part of them? When the

"dawn

" dawn of that day approaches, in which " all the diſtreſsful incidents of this drama " ſhall be unravelled; when the great " chain at length is let down, and all " that has held the two worlds in harmony " is ſeen; then wilt thou be fully juſtified " in all thy works."

Having thus endeavoured to ſhow the difficulty of comprehending natural religion, I will now go on, and examine how far the ſame obſervation is applicable to revealed religion.

I. It ſeems to be the plan of the Deity in all his diſpenſations to mix light with darkneſs, and evidence with uncertainty; and in no inſtance is this truth more obviouſly diſplayed than in the perſon and character of Jeſus Chriſt. That God was manifeſt in the fleſh few men, I think, will deny; that he came down from Heaven to propagate a new religion, and to ſhew men the way to eternal life; that

he taught them many new and important truths, far above the reach of human reaſon to comprehend, and "brought them "out of darkneſs into his marvellous "light." All this, I ſay, is clear and obvious: But here we find ourſelves obliged to ſtop, for if we attempt to proceed a ſingle ſtep farther, we meet with inſuperable difficulties. Why that revelation, which affords ſuch material inſtruction to man concerning his duty and happineſs, ſhould have left ſo many doubts unreſolved? Why it was not given ſooner? and why not to all men? "Why the offences of "us or our forefathers could not be par-"doned without a Redeemer? Why the "Judge of the World ſhould make the "happineſs of one being depend on the "conduct of another? And why, in par-"ticular, guilt could not be waſhed away "without the ſufferings of innocence? "Theſe are points of which we find no-"thing in ſcripture, and of which, there-"fore, we are obliged to acknowledge we

"know

"know nothing."* In like manner, of the doctrine of the Trinity, the ſcriptures aſſure us, that God the Father has an only Son, who for our redemption came down from Heaven; that he has a Holy Ghoſt, who inſpired the Apoſtles, and is always aſſiſting pious and good men in the great work of their ſalvation. Thus far the ſcriptures are clear and expreſs: But how the Son and Holy Ghoſt are one with the Father! How they were derived from him, or are united to him, are points which have not been revealed, and of which I am not aſhamed to ſay we know nothing.

II. What I have here advanced relates to the general plan of our redemption; but if we deſcend to particulars the ſame difficulties will ſtill ariſe; we ſhall ſtill meet with many things which are very obſcure, and, as the Apoſtle acknowledges, "are hard to be underſtood." If any one

* Dr. Balguy's Diſcourſes, p. 200.

ſhould

ſhould diſpute this point, let him open his Bible, and take almoſt any page that occurs in either Teſtament, and ſee whether there be nothing too hard for his underſtanding; let him fairly ſay, whether he does not find matters that are too high and too elevated to be taken in by his limited capacity. Is it not the obſcurity of many paſſages in the ſcriptures that has ſplit the religion of Chriſt into ſo many ſects, both ancient and modern? Is it not this which has produced ſuch a variety of opinions upon the ſame ſubject, even amongſt men of the ſoundeſt heads, and the moſt uncorrupt hearts?

I have now gone thro' all that I propoſed concerning the obſcurity and imperfection of our religious knowledge: I will in the next place endeavour to account for that imperfection. If it be aſked, then, *why* the Deity thus "hideth himſelf, as it "were, from the children of men?" I anſwer in one word, we are formed rather to *act* than to *know*. God has purpoſely limited

limited our underſtandings, and made us capable of comprehending only ſuch a portion of himſelf as is ſuitable to our preſent condition. We are placed here as moral agents in a ſtate of diſcipline, and conſequently muſt expect ſuch dealings and diſpenſations as are ſuitable to ſuch a condition. Had the Deity given us a full and complete view of all his ineſtimable perfections; had he opened wide to us the bleſſed manſions of eternal glory, and given us a clear proſpect of all thoſe unſpeakable joys, which are appointed to be the rewards of virtue; where would have been the merits either of faith or practice? where would have been the praiſe of working out our own ſalvation with fear and trembling? Men, inſtead of being led to their duty, would have been driven by the irreſiſtible force of the objects before them, and conſequently virtue would have loſt it's very nature, for there can be no virtue where there is no freedom of choice.

It was evidently deſigned by the Deity, that in our preſent ſtate we ſhould "walk "by faith, not by ſight." A full and perfect knowledge of all divine and eternal objects would have been entirely inconſiſtent with the plan and deſign of our preſent exiſtence. It would have raiſed us to a ſtate of being too high and exalted for the conſtitution of our nature; would have given us a view of objects too great and ſtriking for our preſent faculties. Every worldly attachment would have been ſubdued by the overpowerful diſcoveries of eternity. No trial of ſincerity would have remained. No opportunity would have been left for thoſe active exertions, which are the very means of purifying and perfecting the ſouls of the faithful. If it were poſſible to remove that obſcurity which at preſent hangs over eternal objects, we ſhould remove human virtue from its place; we ſhould overturn that whole ſyſtem of diſcipline, by which imperfect creatures are gradually trained up to a perfect obedience.

From

From the preceding reaſonings, then, I think, we may fairly conclude, that the Deity has deſignedly thrown a veil over his own works both in nature and in grace. Chriſtianity, we are ſure, was never meant to give us a full and clear perception of all divine and eternal objects; was never meant to gratify the vanity of worldly wiſdom. It was deſigned to give us rules for the conduct of our lives, to aſſiſt us in the diſcharge of our duty, and "to make us "wiſe unto ſalvation."

There will be a time, when we ſhall be placed in another and a higher ſcene of things. There will be a time when our capacities will be enlarged, and we ſhall ſee God as he is. There will be a time when that which we now "know in part "will be done away." At preſent revelation, like the great orb of the ſun when veiled in clouded majeſty, diffuſes it's genial and temperate influence over the whole Chriſtian world, and although it does not ſhine with its full and genuine luſtre, yet it

it is ſufficient to be a guide unto our feet, and a light unto our paths.

Religion, we have ſeen, is difficult, but let not it's difficulties ever diſcourage us in our purſuit after truth; let us conſtantly devote ſome part of our time and thoughts to the ſtudy of thoſe ſacred doctrines, which alone are able to "give us an in-"heritance among the ſaints in light; let "us hold faſt the profeſſion of our faith," as the ſure and ſtedfaſt word of God; let us cultivate it in our breaſts, and profeſs it in our lives. But let us not perplex ourſelves too much about the myſteries of religion; let us not be over curious to pry into thoſe diſpenſations of Providence, which in our preſent ſtate we are quite incapable of comprehending: Rather let us reflect on the ſtraitneſs of our underſtandings, and the ſcantineſs of our knowledge: Let us conſider how dim are our ideas, and how broken are our views, that "we know nothing but in part, and "can only ſee through a glaſs darkly;"

Let

Let us obey the plain and ſimple precepts of Chriſtianity, and in them there is not the ſhadow of a difficulty: Let us cultivate and improve thoſe virtues which will render us acceptable to God, and guide our feet into the way of peace.

ON THE

DANGERS

OF

RICHES.

DISCOURSE IV.

PROV. XXX. 8.

Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me, leſt I be full, and deny thee, and ſay, Who is the Lord? or leſt I be poor and ſteal, and take the name of my God in vain.

YOU may remember an ancient and beautiful allegory to the following purpoſe: Chremylus, a poor and virtuous Athenian, was deſirous of leaving his ſon in a ſtate of eaſe and affluence. Conſcious of the many hardſhips which he himſelf had ſuffered in a ſtate of po-

verty, and anxiouſly wiſhing, like an affectionate parent, to free his ſon from ſo painful a ſituation, he tried by every poſſible means to effect his purpoſe. Diſappointed in his hopes, and fruſtrated in his expectations, he at length reſolved to conſult the Oracle of Apollo upon the ſubject, and deſired to be informed what ſteps were neceſſary to be taken, whereby his wiſhes might beſt be accompliſhed. The Oracle bids him follow the firſt man he ſhould meet on his departure out of the temple. The perſon whom he chanced to ſee was in appearance an old, ſordid, blind man, but was no other than Plutus, the God of Riches. Chremylus, eager to ſeize the preſent opportunity, which offered, of obtaining, if poſſible, his wiſhes, immediately paid his court to the God, repreſented to him the many hardſhips which he had ſuffered in low life, and deſired to be made rich and affluent. The God liſtened to his ſtory with great kindneſs and concern, and ſoon gratified him in the requeſt, which his wild and extravagant fancy had led

led him to make:—But how dangerous is a ſudden change from one extreme to another, from a low to a high condition. The virtuous old man was no ſooner poſſeſſed of his darling wealth, than he began to aſſume a different behaviour, ſoon changed his former temper and diſpoſition into one of a more proud and haughty caſt. He, who had maintained his integrity in low life, now began, in a new and exalted ſtation, to be impious and arrogant. In the room of humility and obedience aroſe inſolence and contempt. With his poverty vaniſhed all his piety: Every religious ſentiment and every virtuous principle was totally eraſed from his heart. Nay! his wild and wanton ſpirit was raiſed to ſo dreadful an extravagance, as urged him on to propoſe, that Plutus ſhould be carried in a ſolemn proceſſion to the temple, and be inſtalled in the room of Jupiter.*

* See this ſtory at large in Ariſtophanes's Plutus.

I have no need to trouble you much in pointing out the inferences which may be drawn from this celebrated allegory. You will probably be beforehand with me in diſcerning that it inſtructs us in two particulars: *Firſt*, as it repreſents to us the inconveniences and hardſhips of poverty; and, *ſecondly*, as it ſhews us the tendency of riches to corrupt the minds and morals of men. Chremylus, it appears, had ſuffered all the pains and puniſhments of mean and abject penury, and from thence was induced to aſk for wealth; but no ſooner were his wants and wiſhes gratified, than he totally forgot his former condition, and began to abuſe the bleſſings of Providence.

From this ſtory I am naturally led to conſider the propriety of the requeſt which Agar has made in the text. In this petition it is plainly intimated, that a middle ſtate of life is preferable either to wealth or want. That a competency is preferable to want every one will readily acknowledge;

ledge; but that it ſhould be more deſirable than wealth, is a point that will not, I fear, be ſo eaſily admitted: For will any one deny, that there are many advantages reſulting from an overflowing and proſperous condition? Are not men's wants ſupplied, and their wiſhes gratified? Are they not in poſſeſſion of every earthly good which fancy can form or folly deviſe? Have they not power and authority, whereby they are enabled to ſupport and protect the weak and dependant part of mankind, are enabled to remove hardſhips, redreſs grievances, and to communicate the comforts and bleſſings of life? Is it poſſible that a condition, which is ſo agreeable, ſo uſeful, ſo beneficial to mankind, ſhould ever become miſchievous, and even fatal to it's poſſeſſors? It certainly may; nay! it actually has proved, in many inſtances, very pernicious and deſtructive to the welfare and happineſs of men.

Let us, then, examine what are the chief dangers which are incident to a ſtate of

riches; what are the vices which immediately and peculiarly reſult from it. So manifold and various are the dangers to which the rich man is expoſed, that it would be a taſk too tedious even to attempt to enumerate all. I will, therefore, in the proſecution of this enquiry, confine myſelf to three principal ones, namely, *Pride*, *Senſuality*, *Irreligion*.

I. As to the *firſt* of theſe, I mean *Pride*, it is unaccountably ſtrange, that a vice, which is ſo abject and contemptible, ſhould ever extend it's pernicious influence thro' ſo large a portion of mankind. If it ſhould be aſked from whence this vice is derived, from what ſource it ſprings, the anſwer is obvious, it ariſes chiefly from ignorance. Men in general are great ſtrangers to themſelves, are totally unacquainted with their own real characters; nor are there any who are more apt to view themſelves in a falſe light, than the rich and powerful. Engaged in the purſuit of worldly enjoyments, and ever liſtening to

to the flatteries of friends and favourites, they have no time to weigh and examine themſelves and their own worth. It is very difficult for the beſt and the wiſeſt of men to keep a ſteady eye upon truth; but they who are always "in a *battle* or in a "*triumph*," are eaſily deluded into an opinion of their own greatneſs, and almoſt neceſſarily become high and haughty, inſolent and imperious. To this may be added another cauſe, which is not without its due influence in producing the vice of which I am ſpeaking: I mean thoſe gaudy ornaments and diſtinguiſhing marks of grandeur, which are conſtant attendants on a high and wealthy condition. Freed from the laborious occupations of life, the rich and affluent dwell at eaſe, and fare ſumptuouſly. They have their horſes and chariots, their man-ſervants and maid-ſervants, their ornaments and elegancies of life, all of which are flattering and deluſive objects, and ſeldom fail to beget high and preſumptuous ſentiments, to fill the mind with vice and vanity, to pervert the under-

derſtanding, and to corrupt the heart. Yet no one, I believe, is weak enough to imagine that there is any intrinſic worth in birth and equipage, in the pomp and pageantry of greatneſs. Beſides, were this even poſſible, are the rich and powerful the only perſons poſſeſſed of qualities that are truly valuable? Is virtue only to be found in a palace, and amidſt a croud of flatterers? Is ſhe ſo coy and haughty a miſtreſs, as only to be courted by the great? Is ſhe not rather the only thing that is wanting to recommend and to adorn their high ſtation and character? Weigh carefully the intrinſic worth of theſe men, and ſee upon what grounds they too often build their ſupercilious conduct. Religion tells us, that wiſdom and virtue are the only requiſites that can render us truly honourable to men, or acceptable to God. And are the rich and powerful uſually exerciſed in the attainment of theſe qualifications? Are they employed in the diſcharge of ſuch duties as are ſuitable to their ſtation and character? Are they

" work-

" working out their own ſalvation with " fear and trembling?" No! too often are they engaged in purſuits of quite a different nature, too often are they ſacrificing every private virtue to their own inordinate luſts and appetites, too often are they hurried on into every vicious exceſs and irregularity, are totally loſt in vice and vanity, in levity and luxury; and yet theſe are the men, who arrogate to themſelves a high and haughty ſpirit, who treat the reſt of mankind as a ſet of beings who are of a different ſpecies with themſelves. The peaſant upon the dung hill has an infinitely better title to praiſe and honour, than ſuch men as theſe. The honeſt and induſtrious cottager, who is earning his daily bread by labour, is to them a pattern of virtue. He is fulfilling the deſigns of Providence, in " abiding patiently in the " ſtation wherein he is called," in living in meekneſs and ſimplicity.—" But alas! what is there, even in the beſt of men, wherein to glory? Human nature is full of infirmities. In the moſt perfect condition

dition of man, there is much cauſe for humility, none for pride and exaltation, for "wherein is our boaſting? What have we, "that we have not received? Or what is "it that makes us to differ from another?" All we are, and all we do, or can poſſeſs, is derived from the bounteous hand of God. What we fooliſhly call our own acquiſitions, we owe to that Being who gives us ability to purſue, and ſucceſs in the purſuit. The wiſdom of Providence has been pleaſed to conſtitute a great variety of ranks and conditions among men; but this diſtinction was never meant to give ſuperiority an occaſion to inſult and to deſpiſe the weak, but to aſſiſt and to ſupport them, to give room for the exerciſe of every virtue, to promote and advance the general good and happineſs of mankind."

II. The *ſecond* thing I propoſed to conſider as a dangerous attendant on riches, is *Senſuality*, and that for two obvious reaſons, I mean the *opportunity* and the *ability* that men of fortune have to offend in this way.

As

1. As to the *firſt* of theſe cauſes, we all know how dangerous a thing it is for any one to have his time wholly in his own diſpoſal. If there is no proper buſineſs provided in the room of what we commonly term labour, a thorough neglect of all good and uſeful purſuits is generally the conſequence; a ſettled indolence and inactivity ſeizes the ſoul, and throws it into a ſtate of languor: Hence ariſes a total diſorder in the affections and paſſions, which hurries us on into the ſtrangeſt irregularities imaginable. A torrent of vice and immorality breaks in upon us, which enfeebles and corrupts the powers both of mind and body. We ſee a true picture of this ſort of conduct amongſt the generality of thoſe who frequent our great metropolis, and who have carried it's luxuries to ſuch an enormous extravagance, as ſurely was never equalled in any age or country. To what *ſhifts* are the rich and opulent driven, in order to find out ways and means of ſquandering away that time, which was deſigned for better purpoſes. To what poor, pitiful

ful contrivances are they forced to have recourſe, for nothing better than to waſte thoſe precious moments, which were given them for the moſt important concerns of life; and well would it be for many of them, if the objects of their purſuits were of a more innocent and inoffenſive nature than they commonly are.

2. The *ſecond* cauſe that I mentioned, is the ability which men of fortune have to tranſgreſs the rules of temperance and ſobriety. They are poſſeſſed of all the requiſites that are neceſſary to enable them to indulge in every vicious exceſs and irregularity. Their riches are always at hand, to gratify their craving appetites with every thing that climate can furniſh, or that luxury can invent. In this dangerous ſituation, how weak and defenceleſs is the power of reaſon? To make a right uſe of the bleſſings of Providence requires much wiſdom and reſolution. Few minds have ballaſt enough to ſtem the torrent of an overflowing and proſperous condition.—

Few

Few are able to withſtand the temptations which it adminiſters to luxury and exceſs. How often do we ſee the rich and affluent abuſing the gifts of God, and wantonly rioting in his mercies, utterly regardleſs of the dangers which attend ſuch a conduct? They injure their conſtitutions, debaſe their nature, and make that body a receptacle for all impurity, which was made, as St. Paul tells us, to be a "temple "for the living God." But alas! How ſhort is the reign and duration of theſe mad pleaſures. Men may indulge in ſenſual exceſſes as much as they pleaſe, may drown themſelves in vice and wickedneſs; but let them well remember, that thoſe who are reſolved to live faſt, ſeldom live long. They are carried off before their time by the draughts of ſin and the poiſon of intemperance. Like a ſhip in a tempeſtuous ſea, they are toſſed and agitated for a while, but are ſhipwrecked and loſt, before they have half finiſhed their voyage.

III.

III. I come in the third and laſt place to ſhew, that rich men are peculiarly addicted to *Irreligion*; and for the ſake of method, I will divide it's votaries into two claſſes, I mean thoſe who are *profeſſed infidels* in religion, and thoſe who are *not* perhaps *ſo bold* and *daring* as to deny the truth of religion, but are ſo *totally* inattentive to it's doctrines, as to render them entirely uſeleſs in regulating their behaviour. Both theſe inſtances of miſconduct are inſeparably connected with the two former vices, which I have already conſidered. They are neceſſary conſequences of pride and ſenſuality; the former being a moſt fruitful ſource of infidelity, and the latter being productive of a total diſregard and inattention to religion. In regard to the firſt of theſe aſſertions, we have already ſeen, that riches have a powerful tendency to make men proud; and when once this ſpirit has taken full poſſeſſion of the heart, they are ſoon brought to entertain high and lofty ſentiments of their own independence, and deluded into a vain opinion of their

their own ſtrength. Fooliſhly imagining that their proſperity is eſtabliſhed upon a fixed and ſolid baſis, they are apt to diſown the want of any ſuperior aid or aſſiſtance, are tempted to throw off all their dependance upon God, and vainly to truſt in uncertain riches. This vanity it was which Agar deſired might be removed far from him: He was afraid, that riches would lead him into pride, and that pride would inſenſibly draw him on to infidelity. On this very account it was that he durſt not deſire them. Give me not riches, ſays he, "leſt I be full and deny thee, "and ſay, who is the Lord?" But is it probable, is it poſſible, that there ſhould be any under the Chriſtian diſpenſation who can thus *preſume*, can thus *dare* to diſclaim the authority of that God, by whom "they live, and move, and have "their being." Yes! unfortunately for them, it is both probable and poſſible; for how many are there amongſt the rich and affluent who are perpetually falling into this flagrant error? Like ſelf-ſufficient and inde-

independent beings, they weakly imagine that they have no need to ſtoop down, and to ſeek for ſupport and protection in the mean and humiliating paths of religion, and eſpecially in the religion of Chriſt, which bears in all it's aſpect nothing but humility and condeſcenſion. Can *they* ſubmit to own the authority of Jeſus, whoſe behaviour and ſentiments were ſo repugnant to their own? Can *they* demean themſelves ſo as to acknowledge *him* for their Lord and Maſter, "who "was meek and lowly in heart, and who "humbled himſelf, and became obedient "unto death, even the death of the croſs?" Thus are they led on by a weak and ſupercilious imagination, are decoyed, as it were, into their own deſtruction, by the ſuggeſtions of pride and folly; are tempted at laſt to throw off every appearance of religion, and ſcruple not to profeſs themſelves infidels and atheiſts:—"But oh! "vain man! haſt thou duly weighed the "evidences of that religion, which thy "forefathers hazarded their lives to de-

"fend?

" fend? Haſt thou conſidered the weak
" and feeble inſtruments by which it was
" propagated and eſtabliſhed? Haſt thou
" conſidered the amazing powers that
" were given to it's firſt profeſſors, and
" the purity and excellence of it's doc-
" trines? Place not, then, thy proud
" and preſumptuous ſentiments in the
" room of reaſon and argument. Reject
" not with ſuch ſcorn and indifference
" thoſe truths, which have been ſo ably
" defended by the advocates of our reli-
" gion. There are names amongſt them
" which will ever be had in awe and re-
" verence by all judicious readers ſo long
" as either Chriſtianity or philoſophy ſhall
" remain. Read the works of Boyle,
" Locke, Clarke, Barrow: Theſe, like the
" great luminary of the world, diſpel the
" darkneſs wherever they go. They have
" given ſuch unqueſtionable proofs of the
" divine authority of Chriſtianity, as can-
" not fail to convince the moſt obſtinate
" infidel, cannot fail to gain the under-

" ſtanding, and to ſend conviction into " the heart."

It ſtill remains to be ſhewn, that *Senſuality* too, as well as *Pride*, is an enemy to religion, by rendering us totally indifferent and inattentive to it; but this particular will ſoon be diſpatched.—When men are wholly immerſed in ſenſual enjoyments, are daily and hourly purſuing the childiſh phantoms of levity and luxury, they have no time to think upon God or a Providence, have no leiſure to turn their thoughts towards objects of ſo ſerious a nature. Ever engaged in the gratification of their appetites and paſſions, they forget that they are religious beings, forget that they are the offspring of God, and are born for eternity. Whereas the poor man is forced, even againſt his will, to be religious: Strongly preſſed by need and neceſſity, and feeling but too ſenſibly his own weak and impotent condition, he is compelled, as it were, to apply to Heaven for aid and aſſiſtance, is obliged to call

call upon that God, from whom alone he can expect ſupport and protection.

I have now, as I propoſed, endeavoured to point out ſome of the chief dangers and inconveniences which ariſe from a wealthy condition.—But here it may be aſked, Is it poſſible, that the vices, which I have been conſidering, ſhould be carried to ſo dreadful an extravagance, as we now experience in the world, by the mere bent of human infirmity? Is there nothing elſe by which they are heightened and increaſed? Yes, there is a cauſe, and that a very powerful one, I mean a *bad education*, the uſual lot of thoſe who are born to riches.—That a child of family and fortune ſhould become proud is not ſurely to be wondered at; for no ſooner is he capable of receiving ill impreſſions, than he is ſurrounded on all ſides by crouds of ſeducing flatterers, each of whom is ſtriving to convince him of his high and independent ſtate. Anxiouſly hoping to become ſharers in the bounty of his future

intereſt, they try every probable means, uſe every poſſible art and contrivance to obtain his favour, and to ſecure his friendſhip. On all occaſions are they watchful and ſtudious to inſtil into his ears ſmooth and beguiling words. The youth, intoxicated with his own greatneſs, falls an eaſy prey to the charms of their deluſive tongue. Conſcious of his own ſuperiority, he begins to aſſume an air of conſequence, and to conſider himſelf as a being infinitely above the generality of men. He becomes proud and preſumptuous, high and haughty.

Nor is it leſs certain, that *ſenſuality*, too, is increaſed among the higher claſſes of men, by a bad education. No ſooner is a child of rank ſent out into the world, than he finds himſelf poſſeſſed of all the means that are requiſite to gratify his wildeſt wants, and warmeſt wiſhes. The fond and fooliſh parent, unwilling that the diſpoſition of ſo promiſing a youth ſhould be cramped and depreſſed, unwilling

ling that the ſtream of his imagination ſhould be checked in it's little idle and wanton ſallies, is ever ready to pour gifts into his lap with a profuſe and liberal hand, never ſuſpecting what dangerous inſtruments they are in the poſſeſſion of one who is ſo apt to convert them to a wrong purpoſe. The headſtrong youth, impatient of reſtraint, and eager to poſſeſs objects which are ſuited to a more manly ſtate, ruſhes on with unbounded licentiouſneſs, and plunges himſelf into the groſſeſt immoralities. The facility with which he obtains his pleaſures is a conſtant encouragement to ſin.—Whereas a child of poverty is in no danger of falling into exceſſes of this ſort. In vain would he ſet his heart upon that which it is not in his power to obtain: The very want of ability to offend is his ſafeguard and ſecurity.

It remains laſtly to be ſhewn, that the education uſually given to the children of

the rich is likely to make them irreligious; and the truth of this obſervation will ſoon appear. Among the various ranks and conditions of life, there is no ſet of men ſo totally inattentive both to the public ceremonies, and to the private duties of religion, as the upper part of mankind. Can it, then, be expected, that the children of men like theſe ſhould not be irreligious as well as themſelves? Are they not ever ready to contract the ſentiments and habits of thoſe around them? It is well known how great is the force and influence of bad example. If parents are remiſs and negligent in their religious duties, their children will, no doubt, claim the ſame privilege, will readily be perſuaded, that what is juſtifiable in one is juſtifiable in both; and when once they have begun to neglect the *offices* of religion, very ſoon are they brought to conſider *religion* itſelf as a matter that is by no means eſſential to their welfare and happineſs, are tempted to throw off all de-

decency and decorum in their behaviour and conduct, and to become early converts to infidelity both in principle and in practice. "Unfortunate young man! Thus "to be placed upon the confines of ſuch "imminent danger; thus to be ſituated "in the midſt of ſo many perilous trials. "How haſt thou cauſe to deprecate that "hand, which digged out the deceitful "treaſure that has beguiled thee of thy "virtue! Better had it been for thee, that "thou hadſt been placed in the loweſt and "meaneſt condition amongſt men, than to "be thus ſhipwrecked and loſt amidſt the "gaudy ornaments of human grandeur! "Happy had it been for thee, that thou "hadſt been born of the pooreſt and "moſt contemptible of parents, who lead "but a good life, and whoſe example and "precepts would have guided thy feet into "the way of truth!"

Having now, as I propoſed, conſidered ſome of the chief dangers to which men are

are expoſed in a ſtate of riches, I ſhould go on to ſhew what are the inconveniences that are peculiar to poverty, which is the other ſtate petitioned againſt in the text. But this I will leave to be the ſubject of a future diſcourſe.

ON THE

INCONVENIENCES

OF

POVERTY.

BRITISH MUSEUM

DISCOURSE V.

PROV. xxx. viii.

Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me, leſt I be full and deny thee, and ſay, Who is the Lord? or leſt I be poor and ſteal, and take the name of my God in vain.

IN a former diſcourſe on theſe words, I endeavoured to point out ſome of the principal dangers and inconveniences, to which men are expoſed in a ſtate of riches; and in the proſecution of that inquiry, I confined myſelf to three particulars, namely, *Pride*, *Senſuality*, *Irreligion*,

gion, all of which, it was ſhewn, are heightened and increaſed by a bad education, the uſual lot of thoſe who are born to riches: I come now to ſhew the *Inconveniences* that are peculiar to *Poverty*, which is the other ſtate petitioned againſt in the text.

I. The *firſt* that I will mention is the want both of the *opportunity* and the *means* to improve the underſtanding. No ſooner is the child of poverty able to ſpeak and to act, than he is ſent to engage in the painful and laborious occupations of life. Cut off from all the ſocial converſe of man, and doomed only to fulfil his appointed taſk, what hope or comfortable proſpect can he have of acquiring that knowledge which is ſo uſeful and ſo ornamental to human nature? Can it be expected, that thoſe little ſcraps of time, which he is able to ſteal from his daily labour, ſhould be applied to this purpoſe? When his ſtrength is exhauſted by the fatigues of the day, and he wants the neceſſary

ceſſary refreſhments of food and ſleep, then only is his time in his own diſpoſal; and it cannot ſurely be imagined, that he ſhould then forego all relaxation, and quit one kind of labour to engage in another.—Beſides, it is not poſſible that any material advancement in knowledge could be made in his little intervals of reſt, were he ever ſo deſirous of applying them to this purpoſe. Are *they* ſufficient to enable him to execute a deſign, which requires ſo much induſtry and diligence? Can he perform ſo laborious a taſk in a few little fragments of time, which demand whole years of the moſt vigorous endeavours, in order to be executed with any tolerable ſucceſs? The faculties of the mind are almoſt, as it were, *created* by labour, and muſt grow up and flouriſh by uſe and exerciſe. In their infancy they are weak and imperfect, and cannot be brought forward without much care and attention. It fares exactly with them as it does with the body, both become ſtrong and powerful by frequent and ſtrenuous exertions.—Nor is this all, for it is well

well known how rugged and tedious are the ways which lead to ſcience. Many pathleſs tracks muſt be trod, many proud and threatening rocks, which are almoſt inacceſſible, muſt be ſurmounted, innumerable and perplexing mazes muſt be traced, before we can poſſibly reach the object of our purſuit.

But let us ſuppoſe that the aſcent to knowledge is ſmooth and eaſy, and that the poor man has the *opportunity* to improve the underſtanding; he ſtill wants the *means* of doing it. Without money it is impoſſible that any conſiderable progreſs can be made in knowledge. There are but two ways by which it is to be acquired, either from men or from books. From men there is no proſpect of procuring it, becauſe they are not willing to give their aid and aſſiſtance without a recompence ſuitable to ſo difficult and painful a taſk, as that of communicating knowledge; nor indeed is it to be expected that they ſhould—and to books he can gain

gain no acceſs. They are of too expenſive a nature by far to be obtained by him. He has enough to do by his ableſt exertions of induſtry and diligence to ſupply the wants of the body, without allowing any thing towards the care and cultivation of the ſoul.

And here we cannot but lament the unfortunate condition of every poor man who is forced to remain in a ſtate of profound ignorance: Without learning and knowledge, how is it poſſible that he ſhould procure any material good in ſociety? Thoſe excellent qualities, which alone are able to recommend him to the world, are all buried in obſcurity. With a mind uninformed and uncultivated, he is totally unfit for any purſuit which might be productive of benefit and advantage, and conſequently is forced to ſubmit to the painful and laborious occupations of life. Nor is this all; for when the mind is not ſuffered to ſhew it's latent virtues for want of culture, we are not to ſuppoſe that it

is

is barren and unfruitful. If it does not abound in the beſt qualities, it is generally productive of the worſt. Experience convinces us of this in great abundance.—How many perſons are daily and hourly committing the moſt flagrant acts of violence and rapine, who by proper care might have been made good and uſeful members of ſociety? What multitudes of poor and unfortunate men become an early ſacrifice to ſhame for want of the *means* to acquire that knowledge, which is ſo eſſentially neceſſary to guide their feet into the way of truth.—"The de-"ſtruction of the poor is their poverty." *

Perhaps it will here be alledged, that the inconveniences of which we are complaining are in a great meaſure removed by the bounty of the rich. It muſt be acknowledged, that various inſtitutions have been formed for alleviating the wants and diſtreſſes of the poor, and eſpecially

* Prov. x. 15.

in

in regard to education and inſtruction; but it is very obvious, that the benefit reſulting from theſe inſtitutions cannot poſſibly extend to all who ſtand in need of them. The poor comprehend too large a ſhare of ſociety, to be made equal partakers in theſe advantages. Many of them muſt neceſſarily, like the unprofitable ſeed, be "dropt by the way ſide and periſh." Beſides—Are theſe inſtitutions of ſuch a nature as to qualify men for ſuch purſuits as are likely to be attended with any material benefit or advantage? Do they profeſs to carry the underſtanding thro' thoſe intricate mazes of learning, which muſt be trod by all who expect to reach a ſtate of independence? Alas! they are very far from doing this; little more is to be acquired from thence than the very firſt rudiments of knowledge. Or if there *are* inſtitutions founded by charity, which promiſe more than this, they are uſually attended with ſuch conſiderable expences, as to render them utterly uſeleſs to thoſe for whom they were originally deſigned.

But the hard condition of the poor man will appear in ſtill ſtronger colours, if we briefly enumerate a few of the advantages reſulting from knowledge, to all which *he* is an utter ſtranger. Now the advantages of knowledge are ſo plain and obvious, are ſo ſenſibly felt in every ſituation, and under every circumſtance of life, that it is only needful for me juſt to mention them. It is of ſuch ſingular force and efficacy, that it procures friends and favourers wherever it goes. It gives power and authority to many, and awe and reverence to all. "It is eyes to the blind, "and feet to the lame." It adds grace and ornament to youth, and is the joy and delight of old age. * "It is a light unto our "feet, and a lanthorn unto our paths."

To this may be added the ſolid pleaſures, the real and ſubſtantial ſatisfaction, which ariſes from knowledge. It gives ſuch power

* Adoleſcentiam alit, ſenectutem oblectat. Cic.

and

and energy to the mind, exalts and enlarges the human faculties in ſo wonderful a manner, as cannot but afford the higheſt entertainment to it's poſſeſſors that can be. It corrects and mollifies the brutal part of our nature, and converts it to a ſimilitude with that of angels. But what is moſt valuable of all, is *religious knowledge*; by *it* we are not only made acquainted with the various parts of our duty, but are in actual poſſeſſion of all religious truths, and view them in their full and genuine light and luſtre; and this ſurely is an advantage which is of the utmoſt importance to us; from hence are derived ſome of the pureſt joys, and the moſt ſolid ſatisfaction, which human nature is capable of poſſeſſing; from hence are deduced ſuch comfortable reflections, and ſuch delightful ſentiments, as afford peace and tranquility at all times, and in all places. In the midſt of the moſt preſſing afflictions, in "neceſſities, in diſ-"treſſes, in perils of waters, in perils of "robbers," and even in death itſelf, it never fails to pour comfort into our

wounds, and to repel the inſulting ſtorm which beats upon us.

II. The ſecond inconvenience I will mention that ariſes from poverty, is the *contempt* and *ill-uſage* to which poor men are expoſed. This will evidently appear, if we take a ſlight view of the behaviour and conduct of the upper part of mankind towards their inferiors.—Such is the nature of ſociety, that ſome men are born to command, and others are bound to obey; and it is well known how hard and difficult a taſk it is for any one, who is intruſted with power, to uſe it *properly*. To rule with equity requires much wiſdom and reſolution. There are very few men in the world who are willing at all times to be guided and governed by the ſober counſels of reaſon. Heated with paſſion and prejudice, they are ever loſing ſight of that moſt equitable of all rules, of doing to others as they wiſh that men ſhould do unto them. Nor is this ſort of conduct more ſtrongly marked, than in the ungenerous treatment which

which ſlaves and dependants receive from a cruel and capricious tyrant. Forgetting that they are of the ſame nature and ſpecies with himſelf, and warmly catching at the little triffling errors to which human nature is ever ſubject, he blames without juſtice, and cenſures without mercy. To paſs by all thoſe little inſults to which the poor man ſtands expoſed, and which are not leſs galling and inſupportable than the groſſeſt abuſe: Not to mention the ridicule and contemptuous neglect which are conſtant attendants on his mean and abject condition: How often do we ſee the rich and powerful, like the Egyptian taſk maſters, lording it over him with relentleſs ſeverity and rigour! It is remarked by a wiſe heathen, that "vice is "covered by wealth, and virtue by po-"verty;" and this obſervation is ſurely ſo juſt, that no one who reflects at all can doubt of it's truth and propriety; for how many are there amongſt the rich and powerful, whoſe faults and follies are overlooked, if not entirely concealed by their

riches! What multitudes of men are there in high and exalted ſtations, who would dwindle into nothing, would become as contemptible and inſignificant as the meaneſt mechanic, if they were to be deprived of the ornaments and diſtinctions which wealth creates! Often do we ſee an illiterate and debauched rake conveyed in a gilded chariot through the ſtreets and lanes of the city, while the gazing multitude are paying homage to him, and extolling him as a God. Innumerable are the inſtances which might be produced of men of the blackeſt caſt, whoſe faults and failings are all obſcured and loſt amidſt the gaudy ornaments of human grandeur. The deluſive charms of their ſplendid greatneſs throws around them ſuch a flood of light and luſtre, as never fails to dazzle the eyes of the beholders, and to give to vice the appearance of virtue.

On the other hand, the poor man's good qualities are neglected and deſpiſed becauſe he is poor. The mean and ſordid condition

tion in which he is forced to appear, are apt to prejudice the world againſt him. Without dreſs, without the ornaments and diſtinctions of life, it is very difficult for the moſt valuable and ſhining abilities to ſhew themſelves in their genuine and true light. How often has it come to paſs that men of the moſt approved merit have been forced to paſs away a tedious and painful life in poverty, unnoticed and unbefriended! How many perſons of excellent parts amongſt the divines, the poets, and the philoſophers, of every age and country, have been ſuffered to pine away in obſcurity, without the comforts and conveniences, and ſometimes the common neceſſaries of life! Their poverty, like a thick cloud, has overſhadowed all their good qualities, and not ſuffered them to break out and to ſhine upon the world. There cannot, I think, be a more ſtriking picture of a poor man, whoſe merits are loſt in his poverty, than that which is given us by the wiſeſt of men. "There "was a little city," ſays he, "and few men "within

" within it, and there came a great king " againſt it, and beſieged it, and built " great bulwarks againſt it. Now there " was found in it a poor wiſe man, and " he by his wiſdom delivered the city: " yet no man remembered that ſame poor " man."*

III. Another inconvenience which naturally ariſes from a ſtate of ſervitude and dependence, is *envy* and *diſcontent*. The poor man's portion of good things is generally very ſtrait and ſcanty. Without the common comforts and conveniences of life, he is forced to ſtruggle under the preſſure of many and great hardſhips; is forced, perhaps with a weak and infirm conſtitution, to undergo the painful fatigues of labour, in order to ſupply the wants of the body. The expences of his houſe are probably increaſing; his little famiſhed offspring are crying for want of bread; and yet

* Eccleſ. ix. 14.

there

there is no one who is humane and charitable enough to liſten to their cries, or to ſtretch out a friendly hand to throw in a little ſeaſonable relief; and to heighten and increaſe his mortification, many does he ſee in the world who are moving on in a ſphere higher and happier than his own, many there are of the ſame nature and ſpecies, of the ſame frame and faculties with himſelf, poſſeſſing all the bleſſings of good fortune, and ſwimming in ſuperfluities, while he is deſtitute of the common neceſſaries of life. Is it poſſible, then, that he can ſee all this without murmuring and repining? Is it poſſible that he can reflect upon his hard condition without any ſhare of envy and diſcontent? If he can, we may ſafely affirm that he is poſſeſſed of more wiſdom and reſolution than is commonly to be found among men.

IV. Laſtly, one inconvenience more *ſtill* remains to be added to the former, which is far more dreadful than any that has yet

yet been mentioned; for as poverty thus begets envy and diſcontent, ſo as a conſequence of theſe it frequently betrays men into acts of injuſtice, whether to ſolicit a ſupply of their wants by a ſervile compliance, or to force it by rapine and violence. It is expreſſly on this account, that our author deprecates poverty, "leſt I ſteal," ſays he, "and take the name of my God "in vain." He was afraid, that it would draw him into theft and perjury, and other unrighteous practices; and well might he be afraid of this, for how many are there amongſt the poor and indigent who are almoſt, as it were, forced into vice and wickedneſs by the hardſhips which they endure. Diſhoneſty indeed is uſually the effect of a profligate and abandoned mind, but it is ſometimes the child of pitiable neceſſity, which tempts men to do what they condemn, and would otherwiſe abhor. It is a difficult and painful taſk to ſuffer hunger, and to undergo cold and nakedneſs; and although a well-diſpoſed mind will bear a great deal before it conſents

ſents to diſhoneſt practices, yet there are very few men in the world who have virtue enough to ſtarve.

Having now, as I propoſed, endeavoured to point out ſome of the principal dangers and inconveniences which reſpectively attend riches and poverty, I think nothing more needs to be added in order to recommend a middle ſtate, and thereby to juſtify our author's choice. He who is neither placed very high, nor very low, though he may not entirely eſcape the temptations which are incident either to riches or poverty, is yet ſet at the greateſt diſtance from both that can be, and conquently enjoys the ſecureſt ſituation. Extremes are generally dangerous: There is a middle path where we are always moſt ſecure from harm. This truth holds good in a great variety of inſtances, and even in the works of the creation there is ſomething like it. The mountains and the vallies are equally expoſed to the raging fury of the elements, while a middle region

gion is in a great meaſure placed out of the reach of all hazard: The violence of the winds is ſpent above it, while deſtructive floods roll away beneath it.

And here we cannot but take occaſion to admire the great wiſdom and goodneſs of God, in having placed the bulk of mankind in a middle ſtate of life, and thereby having provided for the ſecurity of men in general, as far at leaſt as was conſiſtent with the order and œconomy of the world.

Of the foregoing reflections we may make a very good uſe, and muſt be careful not to make a bad one. Becauſe riches are deceitful, and poverty dangerous, we are not from thence to imagine, that this will excuſe our ill behaviour in either condition; for in every ſituation of life it is our own fault if we retain not our integrity. Wealth and poverty, we have ſeen, are poſts of danger, but they are alſo poſts of honour; and the more formidable

ble the temptations are to which we are expoſed, the more praiſe-worthy and meritorious will be our conduct if we eſcape pure and uncorrupt. Let us not then be diſmayed at the trials which encompaſs us; but the greater we apprehend our danger to be, let us be the more watchful to guard againſt it. If we are placed in a high and exalted ſtation, let us not ſo demean ourſelves in it as to become proud and inſolent, high and haughty. Let us not be tempted to waſte the advantages we poſſeſs upon the poor and periſhing delights which ſenſuality affords. Let us not ſquander them away in the gratifications of our appetites and paſſions, in the fooliſh and fanciful purſuits of luxury. Or if poverty is our harder lot, let us bear it with a firm and manly fortitude, remembering that it is not the condition but the conduct of men which is chiefly to be marked, and which alone can render us truly valuable in the ſight both of God and man.

ON

AVARICE.

DISCOURSE VI.

JOB, XXXI. 24.

If I have made gold my hope, and have ſaid to fine gold, thou art my confidence, I have denied the God that is above.

THERE is no character in the world which has been more univerſally condemned than that of the Miſer. He has ever been the object againſt whom the moraliſt, the ſatiriſt, and the divine, in every age and nation, have thrown out their ſharpeſt invectives; and yet how vain and fruitleſs have been all their reaſonings,

and their wit and ſatire, on this occaſion. Covetouſneſs has always been found to be the moſt irreclaimable of all vices; and no wonder, when we conſider how various are the pretences, under which this vice is able to hide itſelf. The ſpecious names of induſtry, frugality, and prudent management, have often proved the moſt powerful means of deceiving many.

In theſe days of univerſal extravagance and diſſipation, it ſeems to be a needleſs taſk to point out the folly and danger of *covetouſneſs*. There is no occaſion to diſſuade men from practiſing a vice, of which few or none are guilty. This would be true, if the *Miſer* were the only individual to whom this vice could be imputed; but if we examine narrowly the ſubject before us, we ſhall find, that covetouſneſs is a vice far more prevalent in the preſent age, than we are apt to imagine. Men are not free from this imputation, becauſe they ſpend their money. Luxury itſelf, when carried to exceſs, is covetouſneſs: Whoever is ſo thoroughly

roughly engaged in the ſervice of the body, as to neglect the care of the ſoul, may very properly be termed a covetous man.

There are, then, in the world two very oppoſite characters equally guilty of the ſin of covetouſneſs: I mean the *Miſer* and the *Man of Pleaſure*. The former makes no uſe at all of his wealth, and the latter abuſes it.—Of the Miſer I need ſay but little, not only becauſe he is a rare character; but becauſe, whenever he does exiſt, the univerſal contempt in which he is held, is the beſt proof of the folly of his conduct. We cannot but deſpiſe the wretch who cheats himſelf for money, who, although he "has neither child nor brother," will not allow himſelf the moſt common neceſſaries of life, and in the midſt of affluence patiently endures all the real preſſures of the ſevereſt poverty.

One would think it incredible, that any being who is endued with thought and judgment could ever become what is

ſtrictly termed a Miſer; and yet there are men in the world who heap up poſſeſſions on poſſeſſions, without a ſingle thought of doing good to any creature upon earth, not even to themſelves. Like the fooliſh chough, they are ever ready to ſteal money, only that they may hide it. They can give no reaſon, they can offer no pretence for their conduct: They are ſlaves to Mammon without wages: They are afraid to taſte the advantages which they poſſeſs. By their very abundance they are made poor.* St. Paul ſays of a wiſe and good man, that "having nothing, he poſſeſſes all things."† Theſe men poſſeſs all things, and yet have nothing. They have nothing, becauſe that cannot properly be called their's, of which they never did, nor ever mean to make any uſe.

What is chiefly to be marked in this vice is, that it is ever found to operate

* —— Inopem me copia fecit. OVID. MET. iii. 466.

† 2 Cor. vi. 10.

moſt

moſt forcibly at the cloſe of our days. As extravagance is the vice of youth, ſo covetouſneſs is the vice of old age. He, who is the greateſt rake in the early part of his life, often becomes the greateſt miſer at a more advanced period. Men in general are moſt deſirous of obtaining money, when they have neither time nor inclinations to ſpend it. This conduct is certainly ſtrange: Let us endeavour to inveſtigate the cauſes of it.

We all know that human nature is ſeldom or never without it's favourite purſuit. In the heat and vigour of youth, pleaſure is the great object of all our wiſhes. The paſſions are ſtrong and importunate, and call aloud for indulgence. They too often break through every barrier, and over-rule every conſideration; whereas in old age their force is much weakened; but the mind ſtill deſirous of retaining a leading principle, is forced to adopt that moſt monſtrous and unreaſonable paſſion of avarice, that cold and in-

active and ſpiritleſs temper, which leads men into greater errors and abſurdities than all the fire of youth and fancy: And we cannot wonder at this; for altho' the paſſions in youth are very diſorderly and intemperate, yet there is always ſomething to counteract in a certain degree the ruling principle. It is impoſſible for any one who is entering upon the career of life to relinquiſh all ſenſe of ſhame, and the regard which is due to the opinions and ſentiments of men.—Reputation and character are powerful motives, are ſtrong barriers to reſtrain men in their purſuits of ſenſual pleaſure; but with the avaricious man the caſe is widely different: He pays little or no regard to reputation and to friendſhip: Theſe have no charms with him: The coldneſs and inactivity of his temper is fit only to be employed upon baſer objects, and what is ſo proper for that purpoſe as an uſeleſs and a ſordid heap of gold?

But

But the Miſer will probably ſay in his behalf: It is true, I have neither "child nor brother," but I mean, in the end, to bequeath all my ſubſtance to pious uſes. It is not *my* buſineſs to diſſuade any man from applying his money to charitable purpoſes, but one thing I will ſay, that charities of this ſort, when multiplied to too great an exceſs, inſtead of being beneficial, often prove hurtful to ſociety. "Glorious gifts and foundations are like "ſacrifices without ſalt, and but the "painted ſepulchres of alms, which ſoon "putrify and corrupt inwardly; there-"fore meaſure not thine advancements in "quantity, but frame them by meaſure, "and defer not charities till death." *— But let it be granted, that the miſer diſpoſes of his money properly, what merit can he juſtly claim from any application of it after his deceaſe: Whoever does this, is rather liberal of another man's

* See Bacon's Eſſay on Riches.

money

money than of his own. A death-bed charity is little better than a death-bed repentance. The miſer is unwilling to part with his money ſo long as he is able to retain it, and the ſinner is unwilling to part with his ſins, ſo long as he can reap any enjoyment from them.

But the Miſer, it will be ſaid, heaps up money becauſe he is ſure that the *honour* and the *reſpect* which he receives from men, will ever keep pace with his wealth. Honour and reſpect are, no doubt, paid as a tribute to riches, whilſt the ways and means by which they were obtained are generally overlooked or forgotten.—But is there no honour to be obtained, and honour of a far higher nature, by a proper uſe and diſtribution of them? Is no value to be ſet upon the regard, the gratitude, the veneration, which are paid to generous actions? Is there no pleaſure ariſing from a tender relief of miſery and diſtreſs, from being a father to the fatherleſs, and pleading the cauſe of the widow?

widow? This is the manner in which all ſuperfluous wealth ought to be employed. This is the beſt and only means of obtaining real praiſe and honour, and of making our riches a ſubſtantial bleſſing. How beautiful is the deſcription of a great and good man in the perſon of Job, and what honour did he receive for being the friend and patron of virtue! "When "I went out to the gate, thro' the city, "the young men ſaw me and hid themſelves, and the aged aroſe and ſtood up. "The princes refrained talking, and laid "their hand upon their mouth. The nobles held their peace, and their tongue "cleaved to the roof of their mouth. "When the ear heard me, then it bleſſed "me, and when the eye ſaw me, it gave "witneſs to me, becauſe I delivered the "poor that cried, and the fatherleſs, and "him that had none to help him. The "bleſſing of him that was ready to periſh "came upon me, and I cauſed the widow's heart to ſing for joy. I was eyes "to the blind, and feet to the lame; I

"was

" was a father to the poor, and the cauſe " which I knew not, I ſearched out." *— What more needs to be added than this, to recommend to your practice a proper uſe and diſtribution of your riches.

I fear I have already treſpaſſed too much upon your time in examining the character and conduct of the *Miſer*; let us now turn to the *Man of Pleaſure*, and ſee how far covetouſneſs is applicable to *him*: It cannot, I think, be denied, that he who makes riches the object of all his deſires is ſtrictly a covetous man, whatever may be his temper or diſpoſition; and this character is peculiarly applicable to the Man of Pleaſure, for money is his only want and only wiſh. He catches at it with a greedy hand, that he may conſume it upon himſelf: † And how large a portion of mankind are comprehended in this number I need not ſay. Men of the pre-

* Job, xxix. 7.

† Alieni appetens ſui profuſus. SALL. B. C. 5.

ſent

ſent age are no miſers either in the uſe of their money or their time. Well would it be for them if they were a little leſs laviſh of both. They diſſipate their minds, and waſte their fortunes: They ruin themſelves and become poor, that they may be accounted generous by fools and flatterers. Poor they are enough in pocket, but rich in ſpirit: They think there is no harm in purſuing unremittingly thoſe innocent luxuries which are ſo faſhionable amongſt men. But, alas! what has a prudent man to do with faſhion? It is ſurely a moſt dangerous guide, where reſolution is wanting to withſtand it's temptations. Whoever follows it without reſtraint muſt neceſſarily in the end fall a ſacrifice to his folly. What conſequences may we not expect when pleaſure is the buſineſs of human life, is the buſineſs of that life which was deſigned for better purpoſes? Are there no rational employments for men of leiſure? Are there no charms in rural retirement, in friendly converſation, in literary purſuits, in the ſtudy

ſtudy of the works of nature and of art? Can parents receive no pleaſure from the care and education of their children? Can they reap no enjoyment from domeſtic endearments?—Alas! theſe have no place in the modern catalogue of human virtues.—Is there no ſatisfaction to be derived from religious contemplation, from a conſcientious diſcharge of our duty? We cannot ſurely forget how highly our Saviour reprobated the rich man in the Goſpel for his luxury and extravagance, for having ſaid to his ſoul, "Soul, thou "haſt much good laid up for many years, "take thine eaſe, eat, drink, and be "merry."* If this man had caſt his eyes upon the wants and diſtreſſes of the poor, if he had conſidered how many hearts he might have gladdened by a little ſeaſonable relief, he would have had no need to have enlarged his barns, and to have conſidered where to beſtow his fruits and his goods.

* Luke xii. 19.

You,

You, then, who are living in a continued round of gaiety and diſſipation, correct your idle and extravagant follies: Conſider how highly you offend againſt God when you thus make gold your hope, and fine gold your confidence. Money, you well know, was not beſtowed upon you merely that you might amuſe yourſelves with it. It was given you in truſt, that you might diſtribute to all who are in need "their portion of meat in due "ſeaſon." Whatever you may poſſeſs, you are to be conſidered as proprietors only of ſuch a portion as is ſuitable to the condition in which you are placed. As to the remainder, you are to be accounted "as ſtewards of the manifold "grace of God;" you are bound by every tie of nature and of gratitude to adminiſter to the wants of the poor; I mean, to the wants of the poor labourer, who is probably worn out by long and hard ſervices: He is the proper object of your compaſſion; he is the perſon who merits above all others your care and concern.

Give

Give me leave to conclude my diſcourſe with a few obſervations addreſſed to the younger part of my hearers.—To you, then, who are juſt entering upon the career of life, let me offer a little plain and friendly advice, for you ſtand more in need of advice than thoſe who have age and experience. Give me leave, in oppoſition to your prevailing character, to recommend frugality to you, as one ſure means of promoting your intereſt and happineſs both here and hereafter. Be not ſo unthinking as to laviſh away your time and money upon every idle and trifling amuſement, which folly is ever preſenting to your view. Learn the true uſe and value of money, and avoid that moſt diſgraceful of all characters, of being old in folly while you are young in years. It muſt be expected at your age, that you ſhould be full of thoſe high ſpirits, and gay imaginations, which youth naturally creates; but take care of yourſelves, and remember, that there will be a time when you will become old, there will be a time when

when that money which you now foolishly squander away would be most acceptable, and most beneficial to you.—When age and distempers grow upon you, many comforts and conveniences will be wanting, which cannot be purchased without money. It has often been observed, that "an old man has no friend "but his money;" and I wish the observation was less just than it is; for how wretched and friendless is he who is both old and poor, who is loaded with infirmities, and at the same time is unable either to assist himself, or to purchase the assistance of others. How wretched is he who cannot in any degree alleviate those sorrows which want and weakness are sure to create. This consideration alone is sufficient to recommend frugality to your choice, even in your greenest years. It is enough to make the gayest and the most dissipated amongst you to take good heed how he disposes of his money.

To

To you who have more age and experience I have but little to ſay, for it is to be hoped that you are capable of thinking and of judging for yourſelves. You have no need to be told what is the uſe and what the abuſe of riches. You have no need to be told, that extravagance on one hand, and parſimony on the other, are dangerous extremes, and ſeldom fail to lead men into the moſt fatal miſtakes. In one thing, however, permit me to inſtruct you. If you have children, take care to make a proper proviſion for them, ſuch a proviſion I mean as is ſuitable to the condition in which they were born; but be not too ſolicitous to leave them great fortunes. You, who were born probably to induſtry yourſelves, be not over anxious to place your children above the want of it, for this very circumſtance alone often proves their ruin. You cannot be ignorant, that in great riches there are great dangers. The temptations with which the young and affluent are ever ſurrounded are ſeldom to be withſtood; and your

children are often made miſerable by thoſe very means that were deſigned to ſerve them. How would it grieve and vex a careful and induſtrious father, if he could always ſee his ſon fooliſh and profligate, throwing away that treaſure, as a thing of nought, which coſt him whole years of care and trouble and ſolicitude! Inſtances of this ſort are ſo familiar amongſt men, that one would think it could not fail to check that eager ſpirit by which parents are urged on to make immoderate proviſions for their children. A parent does much more for his child by teaching him to uſe a moderate fortune well, than by leaving him a great eſtate.

Let me, then, entreat you to be ever moderate in your purſuit after the things of this world. Conſider the ſhortneſs and uncertainty of human life, and ſee the folly and vanity of all earthly purſuits. If you put your whole truſt and confidence in riches, if you make them your God here upon earth, you will moſt aſſuredly

find no God in Heaven, that will profit or protect you; but you will find a ſevere and juſt Judge, that will puniſh you. If you doubt this, hear what the great Apoſtle St. James's ſays: "Go to now, ye rich "men, weep and howl for your miſeries, "that ſhall come upon you. Your riches "are corrupted, and your garments are "moth-eaten: Your gold and ſilver is "cankered, and the ruſt of them ſhall be "a witneſs againſt you, and ſhall eat your "fleſh as it were fire." * Be not, therefore, too ſolicitous to lay up any earthly treaſure; but let it be your conſtant care and concern "to lay up for yourſelves trea-"ſures in Heaven, where neither moth nor "ruſt doth corrupt, and where thieves "cannot break through nor ſteal." †

* James, v. 1.
† Matthew, vi. 20.

ON

ON

VIGILANCE.

DISCOURSE VII.

1 Cor. x. 12.

Let him that thinketh he ſtandeth, take heed, leſt he fall.

WHEN Cyrus,* King of Perſia, had obtained a ſignal victory over his enemies, amongſt other ſpoils he took captive a young and beautiful woman, named Panthea, the wife of a chief leader in the vanquiſhed army. During the fatigues of war, Cyrus was attended by Araſpes, a young Perſian noblemen, as his friend

* Xenoph. Cyr. Inſti. Lib. vi. § 6.

and companion, whom he eſteemed and valued for the many excellent qualities which he poſſeſſed. This young man, in his diſcourſes with Cyrus, had often maintained, that a mind truly virtuous is incapable of entertaining an unlawful paſſion. Cyrus, knowing the treachery of the human heart, reſolved to try the force and propriety of this young man's reaſoning, and for this end he delivered into his hands his fair captive, truſting that ſhe would be in no danger of ſuffering any improper treatment from ſo excellent a young man; but, alas! how imperfect is human nature! No ſooner was Araſpes in poſſeſſion of the fair captive, than a complaint was made to Cyrus, that his friend had not only ſolicited Panthea to receive him in the room of her abſent huſband, but was preparing to make uſe of force, becauſe his intreaties had proved ineffectual. Cyrus, ſurpriſed and vexed at this unexpected behaviour, immediately ſent for the young man; and reminding him of his former aſſertion, upbraided him

him with the folly of his conduct; told him how diſgraceful it was to treat with contempt the rights of mankind, and to break through the laws of ſociety. The unhappy youth, ſtruck with remorſe, and confounded with ſhame, burſt out into a flood of tears, and crying out, in the bitterneſs of his heart, ſaid, "Oh! Cyrus, I have "two ſouls; if it were not ſo, how could "I at the ſame time pant after virtue "and vice! How could I wiſh and abhor "the ſame thing! I am confident I have "two ſouls, or why ſhould I poſſeſs ſuch "different and oppoſite principles? When "I feel myſelf diſpoſed to ſhun evil, I "want ability to do it."*

* How like to theſe ſentiments of the moral Heathen are thoſe of the great Apoſtle of the Chriſtians, when he ſays, "I am carnal, ſold under ſin, for that, which I do, "I allow not; for what I would, that I do not; but "what I hate, that I do. Now, then, it is no more I "that do it, but ſin, that dwelleth in me; for I know "that in me (that is, in my fleſh) dwelleth no good "thing; for to will is preſent with me, but how to per-"form that which is good, I find not; for the good, "that I would, I do not; but the evil, which I would "not, that I do. ROM. vii. 14.

Such

Such was the behaviour, and ſuch were the ſentiments of one, who had been taught, from his earlieſt childhood, to tread the paths of virtue. He ſaw, from his own experience, that the appetites and paſſions of men are in continual conflict with reaſon and duty, and alternately prevail over each other; that no human excellence exiſts without a mixture of human weakneſs; that virtue and vice are blended together in every individual, and that the moſt ſhining qualities are ſometimes found in him, whoſe mind is darkened and eclipſed by a thouſand other irregular paſſions.

As the ſubject before me ſeems to claim more immediately the attention of the younger part of my audience, to them I beg leave at this time to addreſs myſelf.—You, then, who are full of gaiety and high ſpirits, liſten, I pray you, to the ſober counſels of reaſon. You are perhaps as yet innocent and free; but, believe me, however virtuous your intentions may be, without

without great care and circumſpection, you will not long continue ſo. If you are ſtanding upon the ſureſt ground, you muſt take heed, leſt you fall. The world ſpreads a continual feaſt before you, which is ever courting your eſteem, and inviting your indulgence; and novelty, at your time of life, gives freſh charms to every gratification.

I. 1. At your firſt entrance upon the theatre of the world, your chief care and concern ſhould be, to conſider well the *Deceitfulneſs of Sin*, and the deluſive ſteps by which you too often deſcend from innocence to guilt. It is a very old and a very juſt obſervation, that no man ever became completely wicked at once: Every progreſs in vice is made by ſlow and gradual advances. No one was ever found to throw off immediately the principles of modeſty and virtue: To become eminently bad requires time and experience. When you firſt begin to entertain vicious deſigns, you are full of fears and apprehen-

henſions, like young travellers, who ſtartle and turn aſide at every object which they meet. You enter upon the commiſſion of evil with much reluctance and apparent confuſion. You are alarmed and frightened at the very aſpect of ſin; and well would it be if this principle could always maintain it's hold; but, alas! in this as well as in all other caſes familiarity ever begets contempt. When you have committed one act of wickedneſs, you are eaſily tempted to commit a ſecond, and a third, till at length the progreſs becomes infinite; and by this unexpected gradation in iniquity, you are taught to commit the worſt of crimes without reluctance, and to run every length of evil without any reſtraint. How little did Hazael ſuſpect his own innocence and integrity, when Eliſha told him what cruelties he ſhould commit when he came to be King of Syria! Ignorant of himſelf, and unacquainted with the deceitfulneſs of ſin, he was ſhocked at the very thought; and beholding with abhorrence

rence the bare mention of ſuch impious deeds, he anſwered with an honeſt warmth, "What! is thy ſervant a dog, that he "ſhould do this great thing?" * and yet theſe were the very means by which his future character was ſtamped with infamy and ſhame. Led on from one degree of impiety to another, he was at laſt betrayed into the deepeſt guilt.—How eaſy is it to become vicious; how hard to continue virtuous.

When you take a view of the errors and miſcarriages into which men are perpetually falling, you evidently diſcern, that nothing is more deſtructive to human virtue than to trifle with danger. If your mind is impreſſed with the principles of modeſty and virtue, it ſeldom happens that you are immediately inflamed with the deſire of criminal objects, although they be placed within your reach. Deſire is kindled by converſe and communication.

* 2 Kings, viii. 13.

Theſe

Theſe are the fatal means, by which you fall an eaſy prey to the wiles of Satan. Numberleſs are the perſons who are overthrown in the midſt of their confidence and ſecurity. Of this we have a remarkable inſtance in the ſtory I have juſt now related: When the fair captive was delivered into the hands of Araſpes, how little did he ſuſpect the innocence and integrity of his own heart! How little was he aware of the diſgrace and ignominy into which he was about to fall! He received her as his friend and companion, as one whoſe misfortunes had entitled her to the tendereſt feelings of humanity; and he, no doubt, reſolved at firſt to be her faithful guardian and protector: But, alas! how weak and defenceleſs is the power of reaſon! No ſooner had he diſcerned the beauty and elegance of her perſon, her gentle and affable behaviour, her kind and captivating looks, than he began immediately to entertain unlawful deſigns. He let looſe the reins of imagination, that moſt treacherous guide, which is ever ſtudying to betray

betray you into guilt. His deſires were inflamed; he began to view her in a new light, and to conſider her as the ſupreme object of all his wiſhes: His happineſs was entirely involved in her: Joy and gladneſs ſeemed to ſmile around him, and to gild every opening ſcene, until his reaſon was dethroned, and he became the mean ſlave of ungovernable paſſion.—Juſt ſo the poor innocent and unthinking fly, unconſcious of any harm, dances around the flame, and courts it's own danger, until it's wings are ſcorched, and it falls a prey to it's own preſumption.

2. But beſides the ſlow and almoſt imperceptible ſteps, through which you deſcend from innocence to guilt, there are various other means by which you are in danger of being drawn from your duty, and entangled in ſin. There is not a ſingle ſituation or circumſtance in life which may not give a wrong bias to the mind, and pervert the principles of your nature: There is not a ſingle affection or paſſion

implanted in the human breaſt, which may not be carried beyond it's proper limit, and thereby become hurtful to it's poſſeſſor. The happineſs and the miſery which you experience were evidently deſigned to promote your *good*; and yet how often are they the means and inſtruments of leading you into the moſt fatal errors! How often do they contribute to the corruption of your nature, and the perverſion of your reaſon!" "The bleſſings of God lift you up to preſumption; his judgments ſink you into deſpair. Riches are the parents of pride and luxury; poverty of meanneſs and rapine. Power begets inſolence and contempt; dependence, envy and diſcontent. Company inclines you to levity; ſolitude to moroſeneſs. Your very tables become a ſnare to you. The liquor, which refreſhes you in one degree, is converted into poiſon in another: And the food, which was deſigned for your health, becomes too often an occaſion of falling." In ſhort, your love and your hate, your ambition and avarice,

avarice, your kindneſs and compaſſion, your employments and your pleaſures, your youth and your age, all conſpire to deprive you of your virtue, and to lead you into ſin.—"Nay, it ſometimes happens, that you are led into ſin by endeavouring to avoid it; and rebound with ſuch violence from one vice, that you are quite carried backward into the oppoſite extreme: A man may become an infidel, to avoid the imputation of credulity, and the abhorrence of avarice has made many a prodigal."

II. Another method, by which the young and unwary are imperceptibly drawn from their duty, and entangled in ſin, is *bad Example*.

1. Human nature is prone to imitation. You are naturally and almoſt neceſſarily led to contract the evil habits and diſpoſitions of thoſe with whom you frequently aſſociate. Ignorant of the ways of the world, you are proud, and think it manly to

tread in their ſteps, and to imitate their example. Unaccuſtomed to ſuffer harm, you ſuſpect none: You ruſh forward with impetuous ardour, and wantonly run into your own ruin. You are like the little bird, which haſtens to the ſnare, a giddy, fooliſh, fluttering creature, hurried ſwiftly on, perhaps decoyed by the ſong of another, and pleaſed with the proſpect of a companion, until he finds himſelf in a cage.

2. You may alſo be drawn aſide from *Authority*. It is too common with men of looſe and licentious principles to ſhelter their ill conduct under the example of others. We are not worſe, ſay they, than the reſt of mankind; and have we not a right to live like other men? But, ſurely, you are not weak enough to imagine, that the nature of vice can be changed by the number of it's votaries. Numbers may give it countenance, but they cannot mitigate it's malignity. Know you not, that you are forbidden, by the word of God,

God, to follow even a multitude to do evil." The ill-conduct of others is no apology for your iniquities. "Beware, "then, leſt being led away by the error "of the wicked, you fall from your own "ſteadfaſtneſs."

III. But the moſt fatal means by which you may be caught is, *the Treachery of your own Heart.* "The heart of man, ſays "the holy Prophet, is deceitful above all "things, and deſperately wicked." To recount all the cheats which it impoſes upon itſelf, would be a formidable taſk indeed; give me leave, however, to mention one or two of the moſt material.

1. When you firſt enter upon the tranſgreſſion of known duty, you are apt to fancy, that the ſins which you commit are ſo ſmall, that you are in no danger of injuring your characters irreparably. You are weak enough to imagine, that the little inroads which you make into wickedneſs, are ſo triffling, that your re-

treat is always ſecure, and that you cannot poſſibly fall into any flagrant breach of duty. Preſumptuous creatures! thus to ſport with your own innocence and integrity. Can you ſay, thus far I will go and no farther? Can you ſet bounds to your deſires, when once they are become looſe and diſorderly? The littleneſs of your ſins is the very cauſe of your ruin. An atrocious crime is beheld with abhorrence, and the honeſt and ingenuous mind revolts from it with deteſtation, and is carried perhaps to greater degrees of virtue by the very violence with which it fell from it; but to proceed in wickedneſs by ſlow and gradual advances, to be carried on ſtep by ſtep thro' a ſeries of triffling gratifications, is ever dangerous and deſtructive in the higheſt degree.—Every criminal indulgence ſwells and blackens in it's progreſs; and what was once a ſmall cloud,* no bigger than a man's hand, riſing out of the ſea, was

* 1 Kings, xviii. 44.

ſoon

ſoon found to carry ſtorm and tempeſt in it's boſom.

2. You may alſo err through the treachery of your own heart, by *too much ardor in lawful purſuits*; for then you are in great danger of falling from your duty. In the heat and fervor of youth, you are apt to fancy that there can be harm where there is no actual ſin. You have a full right, you think, to purſue to any length the innocent pleaſures of life; but deceive not yourſelves, for theſe innocent pleaſures, as they are uſually called, are too often followed by the worſt of crimes. However virtuous your intentions may be at your firſt ſetting out, you generally return, like the ſtriken deer, with a wound upon your conſcience. Exceſs, even in the moſt allowable pleaſures, weakens and corrupts the heart, and imperceptibly betrays you into wrong compliances. You are eaſily led to overpaſs the bounds of virtue. You cannot be a frequent companion of the intemperate aud prophane,

without ſometimes overſhooting the mark, and going farther than you ought, or perhaps than you intended.

3. Your heart may alſo betray you into ſin, by endeavouring to extenuate it's guilt. When you firſt begin to entertain vicious ſentiments, you are willing to conſider your deſigns as nothing more than the effects of a little youthful gaiety. It can be no offence to the Almighty, ſay you, that I give a little ſcope and liberty to thoſe appetites and paſſions which were given me on purpoſe to be gratified. It is impoſſible that he "who is good to all, "and whoſe tender mercies are over all his "works," ſhould have ſpread a continual feaſt before me, and yet not allow me to partake of it. But, good God! how can you thus ſport with the juſtice and the mercy of the Supreme Being. Is not ſin in it's very nature ever pernicious and deſtructive in the higheſt degree? and can you alter or reverſe thoſe decrees of Heaven, which were eſtabliſhed before the foundation

dation of the world? Can you make void the word of God, and with impunity trample upon his laws? Recollect, I beſeech you, in what manner God has, at all times, dealt with the children of diſobedience. Recollect the fatal effects of our firſt parents' tranſgreſſion. Recollect the many inſtances in the ſacred volume of individuals puniſhed, of a people ſcourged, of cities overthrown, and of the world itſelf being overwhelmed for diſobedience. Or if theſe things are not ſufficient, look up to the Croſs, and there behold the Son of God expiring for the ſins of all mankind, and from thence learn to eſtimate the pernicious nature of ſin; and if God would accept no leſs a ranſome for it than the death of his only Son, can you expect to go unpuniſhed? Can you live in open rebellion againſt him, and yet hope to eſcape his unerring vengeance? Can you extenuate your conduct upon any principles of reaſon or common ſenſe?

You are apt to plead the privileges of youth, are apt to alledge conſtitution and the infirmities of your nature, in your behalf, are apt to talk of the trying ſituation and circumſtances in which you have been placed, as affording temptations too ſtrong for human virtue to reſiſt: But deceive not yourſelves with ſuch frivolous pretences. It is not conſtitution, it is not the weakneſs and infirmity of your nature, or the power of temptation, that you ought here to plead, but evil habit, and habit confirmed and eſtabliſhed by long uſe and indulgence. Can you call that an infirmity, which is directly contrary to the dictates of your own conſcience? Can you call that an infirmity, by which you wilfully tranſgreſs the laws of ſociety, and ſcruple not to violate the moſt ſacred ties of friendſhip? Can you call that an infirmity, which is nothing elſe but the offspring of a wicked head, and a corrupt heart? Believe me, there will be a time when you will wiſh that you had acted another part, there will be

be a time when you will be called to a ſtrict account for all your evil deeds.—Whatever deceit you may be able to put upon yourſelves, you cannot deceive God. He is not to be mocked. "Whatſoever "you ſhall ſow, that ſhall you alſo reap." How ſtriking are the words of the Prophet on this ſubject, when he ſays, "Rejoice, "O! young man! in thy youth, and let "thy heart cheer thee in the days of "thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy "heart, and in the ſight of thine eyes; "but know thou, that for all theſe things "God will bring thee to judgment." *

* Eccleſ. xi. 9.

ON

VIGILANCE.

BRITISH MUSEUM

DISCOURSE VIII.

1 Cor. x. 12.

Let him that thinketh he ſtandeth, take heed, leſt he fall.

IN a former diſcourſe on theſe words, I endeavoured to ſhew, that men of the beſt principles, and moſt virtuous intentions, who think themſelves perhaps in perfect ſecurity, are yet in danger of falling from their own ſteadfaſtneſs—by the Deceitfulneſs of Sin—by the Force of bad Example—or by the Treachery of their own Hearts. They are caught by the deceit-

ceitfulneſs of ſin, from the almoſt imperceptible ſteps through which they deſcend from innocence to guilt. They are carried away by the force of bad example, either from imitating the manners of thoſe with whom they converſe, or from giving way to the greater or the better part of mankind. They are drawn aſide through the treachery of their own heart —1. by fancying that the little *inroads* which they make into the borders of vice are ſo trifling, that their retreat is always ſecure;—2. by too much *ardor* in lawful purſuits;—3. or laſtly, by endeavouring to extenuate the *ſenſe* of their *guilt*.

Thus far I went in a preceding diſcourſe, and it might perhaps be thought ſufficient for the conviction of any reaſonable man thus to have pointed out the *dangers* to which he is expoſed in his conflict with himſelf and with the world; yet, I truſt, I ſhall be excuſed if I ſhould, in a matter of ſo great importance, purſue the ſame ſubject a little farther, and en-

endeavour to ſhew how theſe dangers may beſt be avoided.

To accompliſh this end, you need only follow the advice of your bleſſed Maſter, when he commands you to "watch "and to pray, that ye enter not into "temptation."* *Watchfulneſs* and *prayer*, if duly exerciſed, cannot fail to have the moſt beneficial influence upon your whole life and converſation: By the former you are taught to employ and exert your own ſtrength, and by the latter you are enabled to arm the Almighty in your defence; and when heaven and earth are thus combined, even the gates of hell cannot prevail againſt them.

I. The firſt ſtep, then, towards diſcharging well the duty of watchfulneſs, is to guard againſt the very *beginnings* of irregular paſſion. You muſt not ſuffer yourſelves to go a ſingle ſtep beyond the

* Matt. xxvi. 41.

line

line of innocence and ſafety. Impetuous appetite and blind fancy muſt be ſtopped in their firſt career, or they will ſoon hurry you to deſtruction. You muſt reſiſt the very firſt impreſſions of vice, and call them to the bar of reaſon, before they have had time to acquire ſtrength: The eaſieſt as well as the beſt way of being virtuous is to be *entirely* ſo. The heart of man, like the faireſt fruit, may eaſily be preſerved in ſoundneſs and ſecurity, but when once it is touched and tainted with the ſlighteſt beginnings of decay, it ſoon diſſolves into rottenneſs and ruin. Had the pious King David been wiſe enough to have checked his unruly paſſion when he firſt ſaw the beautiful Bathſheba * waſhing and unattired, how much remorſe and anguiſh of ſoul might he have avoided! From this little incident he was tempted to commit adultery and murder, two of the blackeſt crimes that can poſſibly pollute the human breaſt, and crimes which the future

* 2 Sam. ix. 2.

period

period of his life, although devoted wholly to penitence and piety, could never efface. He loſt the peace and quiet of his own mind, forfeited, for a ſeaſon, the favour and friendſhip of God, and ſtands recorded as a laſting monument of human infirmity to the lateſt ages.

Take example, then, from this ſtriking inſtance of miſconduct, and learn your duty. Suppreſs the very beginnings of vice, and as far as may be cut off all occaſions of ſin: Take alarm at the firſt appearance of it; if it be poſſible, in no inſtance ſuffer your virtue to be put to the trial. Never truſt your own heart, which is always ready to betray you into guilt. He deſerves not the name of a man who wantonly courts his own danger, and wilfully puts himſelf into the way of temptation. Occaſion and opportunity have ever been the great deſtroyers of human virtue, have often overthrown the beſt and moſt virtuous intentions. Was it not this which urged on the wife of Potiphar

to

to deſtroy the integrity of Pharoah's ſteward? * Fly, then, from danger, as the only ſure means of eſcaping it. Far better is it to prevent than to remedy a fault; for although you may perhaps heal the wound that has been made, yet the ſcar is ſure to remain.

II. Watchfulneſs, alſo, implies a *continual ſenſe* and *apprehenſion* of the dangers to which you are expoſed. If you are remiſs and negligent in this important duty, you are ſure to fall into the ſnares of the tempter. You have a vigilant and active enemy, who is ever wiſhing to betray you into ſin. If you are idle and unemployed, he is the more buſy in trying to deceive you. When the ſoul is at play, he is then ſtudying every poſſible means of bringing you into bondage.—Idleneſs is ſeldom accompanied with innocence: It leaves you too open and ex-expoſed to the artful attacks of your ad-

* Gen. xxxix. 7.

ver-

verſary, and is the cauſe and inlet of all impurity: Whereas an uninterrupted purſuit of ſtudy or of buſineſs is the beſt guard of your innocence. It ſtops all the avenues which lead to wickedneſs, and leaves no room for the ſolicitations and encouragement of ſin.

You, then, who are living in eaſe and affluence, conſider the dangers which aſſail you, and ſtudy the moſt effectual means of avoiding them. Be careful to employ, as far as may be, every moment of your life in real and actual buſineſs. Leave as little time as poſſible to be waſted in pleaſure. Few minds have a reliſh for any pleaſures that are not criminal. Employment is the beſt ſecurity, that you can poſſibly have, againſt the encroachments of ſin; and the more active you are, the more likely to be innocent. Grace as well as nature abhors a vacuum; both are made perfect by uſe and exerciſe. If you ſuffer yourſelves to

"dwell careleſſly," * how can you expect to continue in ſafety: If you ſlumber or ſleep, whatever may be your *power*, you have no *opportunity* to reſiſt. The bow that is unbent is unfit for uſe: It is the duty and the buſineſs of a good warrior to be always ready and prepared for battle. You muſt ſtand, having your loins girt about, and be watchful, as one who expects the impending blow from his adverſary. If you do this, you are ſure to contend with ſingular advantage; for if you ſhould not have ſtrength to oppoſe the ſtroke, you may yet have art enough to evade it.

III. That you may be able to perform the duty of watchfulneſs, you muſt be *temperate* in all things; without this you are in the moſt imminent danger of being overthrown. Temperance is your beſt ſecurity againſt the deluſions of ſin. It

* Judges, xviii. 7.

is

is the parent as well as the guardian of every virtue: It leaves your reaſon free, and at full liberty to ſtand upon the watch, and to give the alarm at the firſt appearance of danger. The temperate man is always ready and prepared to oppoſe the attack of his enemy. By his abſtinence too he weakens the very power of temptation; he diſarms it both of it's wiles and it's weapons; he refuſes to give it that ſupport and encouragement, by which alone it is enabled to gain ſtrength, and to prevail over his reaſon.—On the contrary, intemperance is the great deſtroyer of human virtue: It inflames the paſſions, clouds the underſtanding, and corrupts the heart; it unfits both the mind and the body for every rational purſuit, and is the greateſt enemy that can be to care and caution. How ſhould he ſtand upon the watch, who is always ſtudying to gratify his inordinate appetites! How ſhould he be deſirous and willing to guard againſt temptations, who is ever drowning his ſenſes in intemperance,

rance, and thinks it his higheſt glory and happineſs to enjoy ſenſual gratifications!

St. Paul adviſes his converts to endure hardneſs, as good ſoldiers of Jeſus Chriſt. He bids them "put on the whole armour "of God, that they may be able to ſtand "againſt the wiles of the Devil." It is your duty to follow the ſame example: If you wiſh to conquer as Chriſtians, you muſt adopt military diſcipline, and place yourſelves as ſentinels to guard the very avenues of ſin. There is a great reſemblance between Chriſtian and political warfare; both require great temperance and ſobriety, both demand the utmoſt vigilance and activity. If you are given to pleaſure, if you ſlumber or ſleep, you are ſure to be deſtroyed. How many armies have been routed and overthrown! How many cities and garriſons have been ſurprized and ſacked by their enemies, whilſt they were either ſleeping or wallowing in intemperance and ſenſuality! Was it

it not this which deſtroyed the vaſt and vaunting army of Benhaded, King of Syria? For we are told, that Ahab, with a handful of men only, came upon him unawares, and cut him off, whilſt he and two and thirty Kings, his confederates, "were drinking themſelves drunk in their "pavilions."* Was it not this which overthrew the great leader † of the Punic army in the midſt of his conqueſts? For we read, that he had no ſooner reached the luxurious and effeminate city of Capua, than he began to ſink into eaſe and indolence. Fluſhed with his former good fortune, and pluming himſelf upon the honours which he had obtained, he neglected to puſh on his victories, and for ever loſt the opportunity of becoming maſter of the world. He began to eat, and to drink, and to be drunken, and thereby became an eaſy prey to his adverſary.

* 1 Kings, xx. 16.
† Hannibal.

Learn, then, from this memorable inſtance of miſconduct to eſtimate the true value of watchfulneſs in your Chriſtian warfare. If you wiſh to keep a conſtant eye upon the enemy, you muſt avoid intemperance, as a rock on which thouſands have periſhed. You muſt not ſuffer yourſelves, in any degree, to be the companions of thoſe who love rioting and banquets. Take heed, leſt at any time "your heart be overcharged with "ſurfeiting and drunkenneſs, and ſo that "day come upon you unawares."*—"Be "ſober, and watch unto prayer, remem-"bering that your adverſary the Devil, "as a roaring lion, is ever going about, "ſeeking whom he may devour." †

IV. Watchfulneſs implies, alſo, a cloſe conſideration of the *ſeveral ways*, by which temptations have at any time prevailed

* Luke, xxi. 34.

† Peter, v. 8.

over

over *you* or *others*. You ſhould examine carefully the means by which you have fallen from virtue, ſhould conſider well the falſe ſteps which you have made, and from thence endeavour to regulate your future conduct. Pity and compaſſion is ever due to him who has once erred, but to be twice deceived, in the ſame inſtance, deſerves uncommon reprehenſion. Suffer not yourſelves, then, to repeat the ſame round of pernicious folly, and tamely expoſe yourſelves to be caught in the ſame ſnare. If you have any decency or diſcretion fly from the temptations, to which you have found yourſelves unequal, with as much care and aſſiduity as you would fly from a peſtilence. Take warning from the miſchiefs which you have already ſuffered, and learn from thence to avoid them. Arm yourſelves beforehand againſt every temptation, that you may never be caught unprepared; and on no occaſion allow yourſelves to be the companions of the profligate and prophane. " When

" ſin-

" ſinners entice thee, conſent thou not."*
" Look not on the wine, when it is red,
" when it giveth it's colour in the cup;
" for at the laſt it biteth like a ſerpent,
" and ſtingeth like an adder." † " Re-
" move thy way from the ſtrange woman,
" and come not nigh the door of her
" houſe. Let not thine heart decline to
" her ways, for her houſe is the way to
" Hell. Thou goeſt after her, as a bird
" haſteth to the ſnare, and knoweth not,
" that it is for his life." ‡

Conſider, too, the ſeveral ways and methods by which *others* have been drawn aſide from virtue, by what arts and ſtratagems *they* have been entangled in ſin. You do not want inſtances of miſconduct for this purpoſe: How many promiſing youths may you behold, who were formed to live in public eſteem, cut off by their vices at

* Prov. i. 10.
† Ibid. xxiii. 31.
‡ Ibid. vii. 23.

the

the very beginning of life. If you were to enquire into the cauſes of their errors in conduct, you would find, that they at firſt were either ſeduced by the evil counſels of a wicked companion, or were, at ſome unguarded moment, hurried into ſin by the ſtrength of ungovernable paſſion. Theſe are the fatal means by which the young and unwary are, too often, deprived of their virtue. Learn, then, to be wiſe from your own experience, and, which is far better, purchaſe wiſdom at the expence of others.

Thus far have I gone in endeavouring to ſhew you, *what* are the chief dangers to which you are expoſed in your religious concerns, and alſo *how* theſe dangers may be avoided.

But beſides your beſt endeavours to do well, there is one thing more ſtill remaining, which is eſſentially neceſſary for your defence againſt temptation; and that is the protection of Heaven. "If the

"Lord

"Lord himſelf," ſays the Pſalmiſt, "were "not on our ſide, when the tempter "riſes up againſt us, he would ſwallow "us up quick, and the ſtream would run "over our ſoul:" * Without the divine aſſiſtance, all other means to protect you from harm, are defective; and this can only be obtained by prayer and ſupplication. "Whatever you aſk in prayer," ſays our Saviour, "believing, you ſhall receive;" † and ſurely nothing can be more true than this aſſurance; for prayer has ever a natural tendency to amend the heart, and you inſenſibly become better, whilſt you are wiſhing to be ſo. When you are offering up your prayers to Almighty God for his mercy and forgiveneſs, deploring your manifold violations of his moſt righteous laws, in thought, word, and deed. When you proſtrate yourſelves before that diſcerning mind, which ſees every motion and diſpoſition

* Pſalms, cxxiv. 3.

† Matthew, xxi. 22.

of

of your ſouls, the moſt impetuous paſſion will not dare to raiſe it's head; it will inſenſibly loſe all it's power, and quietly ſubmit to be governed by the ſober rules of reaſon and religion.

Prayer is the beſt ſecurity that you can poſſibly have againſt ſin. It breaks the force of temptation, curbs the unruly paſſions, ſoftens the inſenſibility of the temper, calls the mind to it's proper duty, ſtrengthens your endeavours, animates your hopes, and produces care and caution in all your conduct.

But beſides theſe *natural* effects of your prayers, I muſt not forget to mention one thing more, and that is, the aſſiſtance of God's Holy Spirit. You are aſſured, from the beſt authority, that your "Heavenly Father is ever ready to give "his Holy Spirit to them that aſk it;* "and

* Luke, xi. 13.

" and his grace in the moſt trying exi-
" gencies, is fully ſufficient for you.*—
" He will not ſuffer you to be tempted
" above that ye are able, but will with
" the temptation alſo make a way to eſcape,
" that ye may be able to bear it." †

It muſt ſtill be acknowledged, that it is your conſtant and earneſt prayer for the divine aſſiſtance, joined with your own vigilance, activity, and ſelf-denial, by which alone you can expect to be ſaved: Both are abſolutely neceſſary for your ſecurity and happineſs, both demand your utmoſt care and attention. Your prayer to God to deliver you from temptation will avail but little, if at the ſame time you overlook the means of your own deliverance. God is ever willing and pleaſed to co-operate with you in your beſt endeavours, but is never diſpoſed to oppoſe your will. " I have this

* 2 Cor. xii. 9.
† 1 Cor. x. 13.

" day,"

"day," ſays he, "ſet before you life "and good, death and evil." * If you wilfully put yourſelves into the way of temptation, and converſe with ſuch objects as are ſure to inflame your appetites and paſſions: If you ſee and know your own danger, and yet neglect to guard againſt it: If you are cold and indifferent in your religious concerns, and forget "your high calling in Chriſt Jeſus," then may you expect to repent ſorely of your miſconduct.

But, on the contrary, if you take care to guard againſt the very beginnings of irregular paſſion, and allow not yourſelves to go a ſingle ſtep beyond the line of innocence and ſafety: If you take alarm at the very firſt approaches of temptation, and in no inſtance ſuffer your virtue to be put to the trial: If you preſerve a continual ſenſe and apprehenſion of the

* Deut. xxx. 15.

dan-

dangers to which you are expoſed: If you duly conſider your own weakneſs, and the great power of your adverſary: If you are vigilant and active, ſober and temperate, in all your proceedings; and above all, if you are careful to offer up both frequently and fervently your devout and pious ſupplications to God for the aſſiſtance of his Holy Spirit, "you "need fear no evil." You will be able to ſtand againſt all the powers of darkneſs combined againſt you. "You may "indeed be troubled on every ſide, but "not in deſpair; you may be perſecuted, "but not forſaken; may be caſt down, "but not deſtroyed. God will make bare "his arm in your defence. He will pre-"pare a table before you againſt them "that trouble you. He will convert your "ſoul, and bring you forth in the paths "of righteouſneſs, for his name's ſake."

ON THE

INCONSISTENCY

BETWEEN THE

LOVE OF PLEASURE,

AND THE

LOVE OF GOD.

DISCOURSE IX.

2 TIM. iii. 4.

Lovers of Pleaſure more than Lovers of God.

IT is generally agreed, that nothing is ſo difficult as to form a juſt judgment of the real characters of men, and to determine exactly their true value. Thoſe, who have ſtudied human nature moſt thoroughly, are, of all others, the readieſt to acknowledge this truth. In almoſt every individual there are found ſuch diſcordant and oppoſite principles,

as render it utterly impoſſible to reduce his actions to any certain rule. Virtue and vice are ſo blended and mingled together, that they cannot be ſeparated with any degree of exactneſs.

Men, in general, have either no characters at all, or it is that of being inconſiſtent with themſelves. They find it much eaſier to join extremities, than to be uniform and of a piece in their conduct. We can ſcarcely recollect a ſingle inſtance amongſt the heroes of ancient or modern times in whom this obſervation is not abundantly verified. Amidſt the glare and ſplendid flaſhes of real and intrinſic merit, ſome little cloud or other is ever riſing to obſcure their brightneſs; and, like the glorious orb of the Sun, they are marked with ſpots and blemiſhes, while they are ſhining out with the pureſt light and luſtre.

But notwithſtanding this great inconſiſtency in the characters and conduct of men,

men, there are ſome caſes in which they not only act with conſiſtence, but with perfect uniformity. It is very obſervable, that in almoſt every human breaſt there is ſome peculiar principle, ſome leading inclination, which bears an abſolute dominion over all the other inferior affections; by it the whole man is guided and governed. If you wiſh, therefore, to form a juſt judgment of the real characters of others, you muſt ſearch out the *ruling paſſion*; there alone you will find that human nature is no diſſembler. In this ſingle particular ſhe follows one invariable rule: The rake and the miſer, the prieſt and the politician, the fool and the philoſopher, are all in their reſpective purſuits both conſtant and conſiſtent.

But amidſt that ſtrange and abſurd variety, which is ſo apparent in the actions of men, no paſſion is ſo prevalent as that immoderate rage for pleaſure, which has ſpread itſelf through all ranks and conditions of life; by it the generality of

men are not only rendered uſeleſs to ſociety, but are become a burden and an incumbrance. They are utterly diſqualified for every beneficial employment, are rendered totally unfit for thoſe ends for which they were ſent into the world.—"They are lovers of pleaſure more than "lovers of God."

From theſe words, then, I ſhall take occaſion to diſcourſe on the great *Inconſiſtence* there is between the *inordinate Love of Pleaſure*, and *the Love of God*; that, by conſidering the nature and tendency of theſe two principles, we may be incited to prefer the one, and to avoid the other. The inconſiſtency of theſe principles will beſt appear by ſhewing, that the love of pleaſure is deſtructive to religion; and that the love of God reſtrains us from the purſuit of ſenſual pleaſure.

Now the love of pleaſure manifeſtly tends to deprive men of their religion—1. by making them inattentive to it—2. by lead-

leading them to diſbelieve it's doctrines—3. and to violate it's laws.

I. That it ſhould make men *inattentive* to religion is not at all to be wondered at; for being once engaged in a courſe of pleaſure, they cannot afford to allot any time to matters of a more ſerious nature. Ever eager to purſue, and anxious to poſſeſs ſenſual objects, they loſe all reliſh for higher purſuits, and more rational employments. Like brute beaſts, that have no underſtanding, they meaſure every enjoyment by the ſtandard of ſenſe; they are incapable of taſting thoſe pleaſures which ariſe from reaſon and reflection. Forgetting their own nature, and thoſe ends for which they were originally deſigned, they ſtrike out into every exceſs and irregularity, are overwhelmed in vice and vanity, are loſt in levity and luxury. In this ſituation, then, how is it to be expected, that men ſhould give any attention to religion, eſpecially to that religion which bears in all it's

aſpect nothing but temperance and ſobriety. Is it poſſible, that they ſhould have any veneration for that God, whom they conſider as the avowed averſary of their moſt favourite purſuits? Can they calmly reſolve to fall down and humble themſelves before that awful Being, whoſe laws they have ſo often violated, and whoſe name they have ſo wantonly blaſphemed? Can they quietly ſubmit to attend a place of public worſhip, and liſten to that word of God, which is ſo repugnant to their own behaviour and ſentiments? No! Rather would they wiſh to fly from his preſence, and withdraw themſelves from every object which bears upon it any viſible ſtamp of virtue and religion. Rather would they wiſh to ſuppreſs every religious ſentiment, and utterly extinguiſh every thought that may caſt a cenſure upon their conduct. Religious aſſemblies but ill ſuit with the habits and ſentiments of thoſe whoſe ſole and only delight are noiſe and tumult, and riot and ribaldry.—"The harp and the viol, the tabret and "pipe,

" pipe, and wine are in their feaſts; but " they regard not the works of the Lord, " neither conſider the operations of his " hands."*

II. Nor is this all, for beſides making men *inattentive to religion*, the love of pleaſure further leads them to *diſbelieve it's doctrines*. Now in order to try this point, we muſt examine what the doctrines of Chriſtianity are, and how they ſuit with the ſentiments of a man of pleaſure. Do they not forbid him, under the ſevereſt penalties, to gratify his inclinations and paſſions? Do they not threaten him with everlaſting puniſhments hereafter, unleſs he lives ſoberly, righteouſly, and godly in this preſent life? Theſe are doctrines that are not likely to be willingly admitted by him whoſe mind and manners are under no government. They ſtrike at the very root and foundation of all that is dear to him on earth. They fetter him in thoſe very

* Iſaiah, v. 12.

points,

points, wherein he wiſhes only to be at liberty. What then is to be expected from him in this dangerous ſituation? Will he comply with the terms of the Goſpel? Will he not try rather to weaken the truth and authority of Revelation? Will he not endeavour to convince himſelf, that religion is nothing elſe but a mere political engine, to frighten into obedience timid and weak mortals; a legendary tale, that took it's riſe and origin amidſt the frauds and fallacies of prieſts and philoſophers? Endeavours like theſe are too often ſucceſsful; for men eaſily believe what they wiſh, and it is no wonder that he who lives like a beaſt, ſhould wiſh to die like one too.

III. It remains laſtly to be ſhewn, that the love of pleaſure tempts men to *violate the laws of our religion.* This is ſo obvious a truth, that there needs but little to be ſaid in it's ſupport. When pleaſure is made the chief purſuit of human life, the paſſions, we all know, are impetuous and head-

headſtrong, are ever apt to rebel againſt the authority of reaſon, and to deſtroy the beſt reſolutions. In this ſituation men are eaſily led to break through all the reſtraints impoſed upon them by God, are eaſily perſuaded to relinquiſh every ſerious ſentiment, and every moral virtue. Intoxicated with exceſs, they are unwilling to confine themſelves within the bounds that are preſcribed by religion, are tempted to uſe the moſt unjuſtifiable means of obtaining their pleaſures, and ſcruple not to forfeit their fame, their honour, their honeſty, rather than give up their favourite purſuits. Is not the paſſion and rage for ſenſual delights, the chief cauſe of that depravity of manners, that total want of religion, which are ſo univerſally prevalent among men? To what other principle are owing the various impieties, the numberleſs irregularities, that are ſo diſgraceful to human nature? "The works of the fleſh," as St. Paul tells us, "are manifeſt to all.

"Adul-

" Adultery, fornication, uncleanneſs, laſ-
" civiouſneſs, an evil eye, ſeditions, en-
" vyings, thefts, murders, drunkenneſs,
" revellings, and ſuch like." * Theſe are that gloomy train of evils which are the conſtant companions of him who is too much addicted to pleaſure. Theſe are the true and genuine offspring of thoſe impious ſpirits that are wholly engaged in the purſuit of ſenſual enjoyments.

Enough has been ſaid to ſhew, that the Love of Pleaſure is an enemy to the Love of God. It remains to be ſhewn, that the Love of God is equally an enemy to the inordinate Love of Pleaſure, and that

I. Becauſe it *confines our ſenſual appetites and paſſions to their natural ſtate.* When men are wholly left to their own guidance and direction, they are too apt upon

* Gal. v. 19.

all

all occaſions to run into irregularities. Ever ready and willing to liſten to the ſuggeſtions of ſenſe, they become the fool and ſport of every little paſſion, and of every low deſire. Heated by the draughts of ſin, and the fumes of intemperance, they laugh at every thing of a ſerious nature, and utterly reject all the laws of decency and decorum. Whereas the love of God fills the mind with awe and reverence, gives ſuch ſtability to virtue, that nothing can move it. It bears ſuch an abſolute ſway over the whole behaviour, as never fails to diſarm ſin of all it's wiles and temptations. When this appears, every meaner thought ſubſides and is ſtill. The appetites and paſſions are afraid to break out into open acts of irregularity, are aſhamed to lift up their heads, and to appear before the awful preſence of ſo divine a gueſt. By it's influence men are preſerved even againſt their will from falling into deſtruction. It ſtops them, as the armed Angel did the ambitious

ous prophet,* in the purſuit of their impious deſigns, and will not ſuffer them to go on. In the very midſt of their conflict they are melted into love: They loſe all taſte and reliſh for ſenſual indulgences, and bear a willing and uniform allegiance to the Supreme Being.

II. Another means whereby the love of God makes men indifferent to ſenſual pleaſure, is *by inſpiring us with other paſſions*, which lift us above theſe mean objects, and render them, on the compariſon, worthleſs and vain. Now the truth of this obſervation cannot, perhaps, be better illuſtrated, than in the character and conduct of King David. Never was there an inſtance of piety and prophaneneſs like him. From being the moſt profligate and abandoned of ſinners, he became the brighteſt example and pattern of virtue. In one period of his life, he was totally

* Numb. xxii. 26.

over-

overwhelmed in vice and wickedneſs.—The gratification of his luſts and appetites was his only aim, his only wiſh; but no ſooner was he convinced of the folly and madneſs of his proceedings, no ſooner had he experienced the force and influence of God's informing Spirit, than he became a thorough and a ſteady convert to religion, and counted all his former pleaſures as mere deluſive dreams, when put in competition with the regard and affection which he bore to his Maker. The whole Book of Pſalms is nearly one entire rhapſody upon the ſolid pleaſures which he found in the paths of virtue, upon the high and exalted value which he ſet upon God's righteous laws. How often do we find him breaking out into the warmeſt expreſſions of real piety and devotion, and pouring out the grateful effuſions of a humble and religious ſpirit! "O! how ſweet," ſays he, "are "thy words unto my taſte! Yea, ſweeter

"than

"than honey unto my mouth;" *—"They "are better unto me than thouſands of "gold and ſilver." †

There is ſomething vaſtly deceitful in all earthly pleaſures. Like the toys of children, they may pleaſe and captivate for a while, but ſoon betray their emptineſs and vanity. To how many accidents are they always liable, and how ſhort is their duration even at beſt? No ſooner are they poſſeſſed, than they vaniſh away, like a morning cloud, or as a ſhadow, that paſſeth by. Whereas the pleaſures ariſing from religion are pure and permanent: They not only afford us, at all times, and in all places, the moſt real and ſubſtantial ſatisfaction, but are placed far above all the injuries of time and chance. No fraud can reach them, no violence can touch them; they are as incorrupt as the

* Pſalms, cxix. 103.
† Ibid. cxix. 72.

ſoul

ſoul itſelf, and without any diminution or decay endure for ever.

Is not then our Saviour perfectly juſtified, when he ſets ſo high a value upon theſe pleaſures? When he ſo remarkably repreſents to us the meanneſs and inſignificancy of all worldly purſuits and enjoyments, compared with the love and gratitude which we owe to our Maker. "If any man," ſays he, "come to me, "and hate not his father and mother, "and wife and children, and brethren, "and ſiſters, yea, and his own life alſo, "he cannot be my diſciple."

III. The love of God prevents our attachment to ſenſual pleaſure, by engaging us in a courſe of action, inconſiſtent with exceſſive and improper gratifications. This obſervation is abundantly verified in the character and conduct of all who retain a juſt ſenſe of God and religion; ſuch men are unwilling to trifle away their

their time upon the poor, periſhing delights which ſenſuality affords. They have no leiſure to be voluptuous, have no deſire to tranſgreſs the rules of temperance and ſobriety. Their time and attention are devoted to higher purſuits and nobler enjoyments. They are ever conſcious, that it is their buſineſs and their duty to cultivate and improve the ſeveral talents that are committed to their truſt: For this end were they born, and for this cauſe came they into the world. On all occaſions, therefore, are they ſtudious of converting their time and abilities to the beſt purpoſes, are ever contriving fit meaſures for the improvement of their own minds, for the care of their families, for the ſervice of their friends or country, or for the general good and happineſs of mankind. In ſhort, they are trying, by every probable means, to contribute to the growth of piety and charity to all around them; are uſing every poſſible end to ſpread, as far as may be, the beneficial influence

fluence of an upright and virtuous conduct. Theſe are the important occupations of all who are true lovers of God and religion; theſe are the laudable purſuits of every one whoſe breaſt is touched with a ſincere and laſting affection for his Maker.

Such, then, is the great and wide inconſiſtence between the love of pleaſure and the love of God.—While the one deprives us of every religious ſentiment, and of every moral virtue, the other purifies our ſouls and exalts our faculties, preſerves the whole frame and conſtitution of our nature in due order, and converts it to a ſimilitude with that of ſaints and angels.

The paths of pleaſure, then, are not the paths of virtue. A wiſe Heathen well underſtood this truth, as appears from that celebrated fable mentioned by

by Xenophon. When Hercules * was about to enter into a ſtate of manhood, and to become his own maſter, he retired alone into a ſolitary place, and debated this queſtion with himſelf.—What courſe of life ſhall I purſue? Shall it be a life of virtue or of pleaſure? While he was deliberately weighing with himſelf this important ſubject, two female perſonages appeared at a diſtance, and drew near to him, whom he preſently found to be Virtue and Pleaſure. They repreſented to him, in very ſtriking colours, the reſpective advantages which they were able to impart to their votaries, and expreſſed their earneſt deſire that he would become one of that number, and ſhare in their uncommon felicity; but no ſooner had they urged their pretenſions, and opened to him their moſt intimate counſels, than he was no longer at a loſs where to fix his choice,

* Xenoph. Memorabilia, Lib. II. capt. ii. § 21.

and

and what conduct to adopt. He discerned instantly and clearly the great beauty and excellence of virtue, and the danger and deformity of vice. If, then, even a Heathen could see the folly of preferring sensual pleasure to virtue, much more ought we Christians to do it, who are not only under the influence of *reason*, but under the command of *revelation*.

ON THE

DUTY OF PARENTS

TOWARDS THEIR

CHILDREN.

BRITISH MUSEUM

DISCOURSE X.

PROV. xxii. 6.

Train up a child in the way he ſhould go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.

WE learn from the Hiſtory of Greece, that amidſt that enlightened nation a barbarous cuſtom prevailed, which is ſo totally inconſiſtent with the principles of nature, as well as the dictates of reaſon and religion, that we muſt neceſſarily have rejected the account as fabulous, if it's truth had not been

been eſtabliſhed by the moſt unqueſtionable evidence. The cuſtom I mean relates to the expoſure of infants. No ſooner was a child born into the world, than the parent, unwilling to be at the trouble and expence of bringing up and educating him, immediately took and laid him down in the open ſtreet of the city, that he might periſh by cold and hunger, or ſent him to ſome diſtant and ſolitary place, where he was left to be inhumanly devoured by birds and beaſts of prey.

What an inſtance is this of the cruelty and depravity of human nature! This barbarous practice was, no doubt, the reſult of *Pagan* ſuperſtition: But, I truſt, I have no need, before a *Chriſtian* congregation, to point out the folly and impiety of this conduct. Parents are taught of God to love and to protect their children, and whoever neglects to diſcharge faithfully his duty on this occaſion has perverted the ſtrongeſt principle

ciple in nature, and is worſe than the beaſts of the field; for they, however wild and ſavage, never fail to adminiſter to the wants and neceſſities of their young, and to feed and to cheriſh them with the tendereſt care and concern.

You, then, who are parents, think it no diſparagement to take example from the brute creation, and learn your duty from them. Conſider how much the ſafety and welfare of your children depend upon a right education! Conſider the obligations you are under to cultivate their minds, and to improve their manners. Conſider, that on your care depends, in a good meaſure, their future behaviour. By it they may be rendered either the ornament or diſgrace, the univerſal advantage or common hurt of ſociety.

There are few, or none, in this aſſembly, I believe, who want to be informed what is their duty in this inſtance, or to be

be exhorted to the practice of it. Give me leave, however, at this time to offer to your conſideration a few remarks, which, I truſt, may be of ſome little uſe to you in the care and management of your children.

I. I will begin with recommending proper *diſcipline* to your notice, as the firſt duty that you are called upon to exerciſe towards your children. This is indeed a moſt eſſential part of education, and yet is either much neglected, or greatly miſapplied. The generality of parents treat their children with too much rigor or too much indulgence, and thereby either weaken their minds, or ſpoil their manners. Of theſe two failures in education, the latter is by far the moſt common, and is uſually attended with the worſt conſequences. Exceſſive indulgence ever proves very injurious to the young and unexperienced; and yet we cannot ſay, how far we are to reprobate this conduct, becauſe it ariſes from affection,

affection, that kind and benevolent principle which was implanted in the human breaſt for wiſe and good purpoſes: But affection may be, and too often is, very injudiciouſly exerciſed. Whenever a parent's love for his child operates too forcibly, it is ſure, like every other immoderate paſſion, to defeat it's own end, is ſure to miſlead the judgment of the parent, and to injure the child.

You, then, who are parents, learn to regulate your affection for your children, and beware of making them too ſenſible of their power over you, for if you do, they are ſure to abuſe it. They will never ſuffer you to be at reſt, 'till they have teaſed you into a compliance with every requeſt, which their wild and wanton fancy may tempt them to make. Let them ſee and feel as much as you pleaſe your kindneſs and eſteem, your care and concern for their happineſs; but let them not be indulged in every idle requeſt; and ever take care to be

uniform

uniform and ſteady in your refuſals. Let them ſee and know, that the reſtraints which you impoſe upon them are directly conducive to their intereſt. By theſe means, they will ſoon diſcern that you are their friend and benefactor, their patron and protector; will ſoon be taught to value your eſteem, and to rely, with entire confidence, on your wiſe and prudent determinations.

But as the affection which ſome parents bear towards their children is too ſtrong, ſo on the contrary, that of others is found to be too weak. Of this we are convinced, from that capricious harſhneſs and the ill-nature with which parents too often treat their children, without any juſt cauſe. Such conduct as this is certainly cruel, I had almoſt ſaid criminal; for let me aſk ſuch parents: Is it right, is it prudent, always to treat your children with ſeverity and rigor? To govern them with temper and moderation is both wiſe and juſt, but to be continually

tinually exerciſing your authority over them upon every frivolous occaſion is highly abſurd. Children ought certainly to be ruled, but it ſhould be by reaſon. You ſhould, on no occaſion, ſuffer yourſelves to be carried away by ſudden tranſports of paſſion, for paſſion is a very improper ingredient in the cultivation of manners.

Nor ought you ever to have recourſe to ſevere meaſures, until you have failed in every other attempt to bring them to a right conduct. Nothing but notorious immoralities, or obſtinate diſobedience, are ſufficient to juſtify correction, and even then it ſhould be done with great temper and moderation, and with apparent reluctance. In this ſenſe only is the wiſe man to be underſtood, when he ſays, "He "that ſpareth the rod, hateth his ſon;" hateth him, becauſe he hath contributed to his ruin, by neglecting to exerciſe proper diſcipline over him, when kind reproofs

proofs and gentle admonitions have proved ineffectual.

But if you muſt adopt ſevere meaſures, be ſure that the grounds upon which you do it are proper. Remember that children are liable, from their very nature, to fall into little errors and miſcarriages. They cannot have that ſenſe and ſolidity, which can only be acquired by time and experience. You ought, on all occaſions, to conſider their diſpoſitions, their age, their ſex, their ability. You ſhould take care to diſtinguiſh properly between childiſh and criminal actions; and to treat each according to their reſpective difference; for a difference their undoubtedly is, which ought ever to be carefully preſerved. If you neglect to do this, your children will ſoon loſe all their concern and affection for you, will ſoon learn to deſpiſe your beſt counſels, and to reject your moſt lawful authority.

While

While I am ſpeaking of diſcipline, let me not forget to caution you againſt *partiality:* Heedleſs and unthinking parents are apt to divide their kindneſs betwixt their children with a very unequal hand, and to treat them with a groundleſs and unwarrantable diſtinction; but ſurely ſuch conduct is very unjuſtifiable; for have not all your children an equal right, while they behave properly, to ſhare in your eſteem? Have they not all an equitable claim to your care and protection? Let not any little prejudice ever tempt you to beſtow your favours upon them with a partial hand. If you are ſenſible that you want a proper ſhare of natural affection for any, endeavour to behave as if you really poſſeſſed it. Let your affection, like the genial heat of the ſun, be equally divided amongſt them. This is abſolutely neceſſary for the ſecurity and happineſs even of thoſe you love beſt; for if your affection extend to one or two, it is ſure to burn, like rays of light contracted in a glaſs, with an intemperate

temperate heat, and to deſtroy the object which it was deſigned to ſerve.

II. The next thing that I wiſh to recommend to parents in the care and education of their children, is proper *inſtruction*; and for the ſake of method, I will divide it into two parts, the firſt relates to religion and morals, and the ſecond to learning and knowledge.

1. As to the former of theſe, parents ſhould well conſider, that when their children come firſt into the world, their minds are totally unfurniſhed with every ſort of ideas; and as they are then free from all impreſſions, ſo they are capable of receiving any. This is the time for you to conſider, what qualifications are requiſite to make them good and uſeful members of ſociety. This is the time for you to exert your endeavours in forming their minds, and furniſhing them with proper ſentiments of virtue and religion. You ſhould infuſe early into them a ſtrong

ſtrong and conſtant ſenſe of God and his goodneſs: You ſhould ſtudy on all occaſions to convince them, that by him "they live, and move, and have their "being;" that he ſees and knows the minuteſt tranſaction of their life, and is the ſure and unerring avenger of all vice and wickedneſs. If you do this effectually, it cannot fail to have the moſt beneficial influence upon their whole life and converſation; it cannot fail to check the progreſs of every ill deſign; it will be a guide to every good, and the guardian of every virtue. Suffer them, on no occaſion, to mention the name of God without the moſt awful reverence. Let them be taught to fear him, to love him, and to obey him, and that to obey and to be happy are one and the ſame thing. Let them be inſtructed in the chief and fundamental articles of Chriſtianity, let them be acquainted with the benefits and bleſſings to which they

they are entitled by obedience, and by obedience only. If you inculcate theſe things with care and conſcientiouſneſs, be aſſured your labours will not be loſt, be aſſured they will in the end contribute greatly to the ſecurity and happineſs of your children; for it is well known, that early impreſſions of piety, however ſuppreſſed for a time, can never be quite extinguiſhed.

On moral duties I will ſay but little. Your own underſtandings will eaſily point them out to you. You have no need to be told what are the advantages which reſult from temperance and prudence, from juſtice and charity. Give me leave, however, to recommend one thing to your notice, which is of very high importance, and that is to teach your children to pay a ſtrict regard to veracity, to ſpeak the truth at all times and on all occaſions. Even in their moſt childiſh amuſements they ſhould be inſtructed to avoid

avoid hypocriſy and falſhood. You ſhould never ſuffer them to utter a lie without immediate reproof, and even correction. You cannot be ignorant that inſincerity in youth is the forerunner of perfidy in old age. Like every other ill-habit, it acquires ſtrength by indulgence, and ſeldom fails in the end to involve it's votaries in the moſt fatal conſequences.—Let them learn from the God of truth himſelf, that "lying lips are an abomination unto the Lord, and that none "ſhall abide in his tabernacle, none ſhall "dwell in his holy hill, but he that "ſpeaketh the truth from his heart;" and yet, alas! how different from this is too frequently the conduct of parents! Often is the unthinking child taught from his very cradle to practice prevarication and hypocriſy: Often is he flattered or threatened into falſhood: Often is he forced to invent a lying excuſe. And thus is he firſt taught to make little inroads into the borders of ſin, and at length becomes

bold in every iniquity, and hardened in every vice. " Unfortunate child! thus " to be trained up to thy own ruin; thus " to be decoyed, as it were, into thy own " deſtruction. Happy had it been for " thee, that thou hadſt had no guide, " rather than a bad one: Happy had it " been for thee, that thou hadſt never " been born, rather than that thou " ſhouldſt have periſhed in the ways of " wickedneſs."

2. But let it here be remembered, that when you have impreſſed upon the minds of your children the beſt principles, you have as yet diſcharged but half your duty. Theſe may make them good men, but they will not make them able citizens. You muſt ſtill take care to cultivate their underſtandings, muſt teach them to exert their faculties in the beſt manner and to the beſt purpoſes. In vain are they endowed with the greateſt abilities, if they want activity to exert them. You muſt inure

inure them early to habits of induſtry. Without this, they can never be expected to ſhine in any literary purſuit; can never be expected to arrive at that perfection in knowledge, which can only be acquired by long labour and conſtant application. Induſtry is the very law of our being, it is the appointed means by which we obtain every thing that is truly valuable, and in no inſtance is it more neceſſary than in the acquiſition of knowledge. And yet how remiſs and negligent are young men in the purſuit of it; how are their minds perverted by the indiſcretion of their parents. No ſooner is a child able to ſpeak and to act, than he is introduced into the world, is carried to places of public diverſion, is engaged in the frivolous amuſements of life, is corrupted and ſpoilt by thoſe very perſons who ought to have been his guides and inſtructors. The fond and fooliſh parent, unconſcious of any harm, ſcruples not, on any occaſion, to break into his hours of

ſtudy and retirement, and to take him from his buſineſs. There is no need to encumber his mind with old and obſolete books. There is no need to perplex his underſtanding with the ſevere diſcipline of ſtudy. The unthinking youth, forgetful of his future views, is ſoon taught to prefer pleaſure to buſineſs, is ſoon taught to grow impatient of reſtraint, and becomes unwilling to ſubmit to the painful drudgery of acquiring knowledge.—He will give himſelf neither the time nor the trouble to cultivate and improve his mind, and to furniſh it with ſuch materials as are abſolutely neceſſary to enable him to paſs through life with benefit. While he is yet a child in years, he is become a man of experience in pleaſure. He ſtudies nothing but dreſs and foppery, and prefers outward ornaments to inward accompliſhment.—This is the education which is given to the generality of young men. This is the way by which they are taught to tread

tread the intricate paths of ſcience.—This is the foundation which is laid for future uſefulneſs, and future eſteem.—Theſe are the means by which they hope to recommend themſelves to ſociety, and to become the friends and favourites of their king and country.

To this cauſe is owing the great ſcarcity there is of learned men, both in church and ſtate. To this cauſe has often been owing the miſmanagement of our public affairs; men are ſeldom qualified, in theſe degenerate days, to become either ſtateſmen or generals, are too often unable to direct the counſels of the nation, are too often unfit to engage in any buſineſs, where thought, and knowledge, and experience are requiſite to form juſt and conſiſtent plans. We are apt to complain loudly of the folly and depravity of the preſent times, and to magnify the paſt, as golden days of innocence; and complaints of this kind are generally very unjuſt,

unjuſt, for human nature has ever been the ſame at all times and in all places; has ever been ſubject to the ſame infirmities, and liable to the ſame miſcarriages: and yet our complaints, in ſome inſtances, ſeem to be made with perfect propriety; for can the preſent times be compared with the paſt in regard to real ſcience? Are we not far leſs induſtrious, and far leſs learned than our forefathers. In this inſtance we have degenerated much from them. We have totally loſt that taſte for ſtudy and contemplation, which carried them to the higheſt eminence in their reſpective purſuits, have totally loſt that honeſt ambition, and generous thirſt for fame, which was their peculiar boaſt and their pride. We have no deſire to excel in any thing, but in the follies and fopperies of the times.

III. The laſt thing I will mention, as a neceſſary attendant on the care and education of your children, is your own virtuous

tuous life and good *example*. This is ſo eſſentially neceſſary to guide them into the way of truth, that without it you cannot preſume to correct or to inſtruct them either with propriety or ſucceſs. In vain do you recommend to them the duties of morality, unleſs at the ſame time you ſhew them living inſtances of virtue in your own perſon and character. And yet, alas! how faulty is the conduct of parents in this inſtance; their example is too frequently a continual contradiction to the very leſſons which they are trying to inculcate. Often do we ſee a father with much ſolemnity, and apparent earneſtneſs, warning his ſon againſt idleneſs, drunkenneſs, and folly, whilſt he himſelf perhaps is waſting his time and his fortune in riot and luxury, and ſcruples not to render himſelf infamous in his neighbourhood, by his profligate practices. Can even children be impoſed upon by ſuch mockery as this? Will they not ſoon ſee through this pretended concern for virtue? Will they not

not be tempted to diſregard the moſt ſerious admonitions, and to deſpiſe religion itſelf? But ſuch parents would do well to conſider how highly they offend againſt God, when they thus corrupt and deſtroy thoſe, whom they are bound by every tie of nature to protect and defend. "Better would it be, ſays our Saviour, "that a mill-ſtone were hanged about "his neck, and he were drowned in the "depth of the ſea, than that any ſhould "offend one of theſe little ones." *

Be not, then, ſo unthinking, as to ſet your children theſe dangerous examples. Be unto them a pattern of virtue, both in your public and private character.—Teach them early leſſons of temperance and induſtry. Go before them in every thing that is good and profitable for their ſecurity and happineſs. Be ſober and moderate in your own amuſements, for

* Matt. xviii. 6.

their

their ſakes. Let it never be laid to your charge, that they are made uſeleſs, perhaps hurtful members of ſociety, and "are at length cut off from the inheri-"tance of the ſaints in light, and con-"demned to outer darkneſs, where ſhall "be weeping and gnaſhing of teeth." *

* Matt. viii. 12.

ON

ON THE

DUTY OF CHILDREN

TOWARDS THEIR

PARENTS.

BRITISH MUSEUM

DISCOURSE XI.

EXOD. XX. 12.

Honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.

IN reading the Hiſtory of the Greeks, we meet with a remarkable ſtory * to the following purpoſe.—A poor and unfortunate old man, having violated the laws of his country, was ſentenced by the civil power to expiate his crime

* See Valerius Maximus, Lib. V. cap. vi. § 7.

by

by his death. For this end, he was ordered by the magiſtrate to be cloſely confined in priſon, and without any ſuſtenance or ſupport, to linger out the ſhort fragment of his life, and to die by-famine —This unfortunate old man had an only child, a daughter, who was bound to him by all the ties of affection and gratitude. During this tedious interval, the daughter obtained leave to viſit daily her unhappy father, and to alleviate, as far as ſhe was able, the deep ſorrow and anguiſh of heart with which he was afflicted; but great care was taken that nothing ſhould be adminiſtered to the ſharp calls of hunger, by this faithful viſitor; and yet, notwithſtanding all the care and caution that was uſed on this occaſion, the poor old man ſtill continued to live, ſtill preſerved his uſual ſtrength and vigour. The keeper of the priſon, ſurpriſed at an event ſo extraordinary, and ſuſpecting that there was ſome failure in his attention, was induced to watch ſtill more narrowly the conduct of the daughter,

ter, when he ſoon diſcovered the cauſe of this ſingular event: No ſooner was the daughter admitted (as ſhe was daily) into the preſence of her father, than ſhe conſtantly appeaſed his hunger with her breaſt. In this extreme exigence, parental love was ſubſtituted in the room of filial duty. Affection and gratitude taught her to become a mother to *him*, whom nature had deſtined to be her father.

What an inſtance is this of filial duty! One would think, that it was not needful to add any thing more on this ſubject, than barely to ſay with our Saviour, "Go and do thou likewiſe;" * and yet it is a ſubject of ſuch infinite conſequence, that it muſt not be thus ſlightly paſſed over. The duties which ariſe from it are many and various, and the obligations to the performance of them ſtrong and important.—Let us, then, examine

* Luke, x. 37.

in what manner children are bound to diſcharge their duty to their parents; and that the force and weight of this buſineſs may more clearly be diſcerned by young minds (for to ſuch I at this time addreſs myſelf) I will divide theſe duties into two claſſes, namely, ſuch as relate to *Infancy* and *Youth*, and ſuch as belong to a ſtate of *Manhood*.—The duties which relate to infancy and youth may all, I think, be comprehended under the three following heads; that is—1. *Reverence*— 2. *Obedience*— and 3. *Attention to the Admonitions and Inſtructions of Parents*.

I. As to the firſt of theſe, namely, *Reverence*, young as you are, you cannot be at a loſs to diſcern the propriety of this duty. Are not parents, by nature, conſtituted to have power over their own offspring? Are they not appointed, as it were, by the Supreme Being, to watch over you, and to protect you from all dangers? To them you are indebted, next under God, for all you do or can poſſeſs. They

are

are your guides and guardians, your friends and benefactors. Is it not, then, highly neceſſary, that you ſhould ever behave towards them with reſpect and reverence? It is your duty to impreſs upon your minds a conſtant fear of offending them. It is your duty to treat them, on all occaſions, with awe and veneration. You are to conform, as far as may be, to their opinions and ſentiments, and cautiouſly to avoid doing any thing that may give them the leaſt pain or uneaſineſs. Your words muſt be few and ſubmiſſive. You muſt always diſapprove with great civility or ſilence, and utter no impropriety of ſpeech, even when you think yourſelves obliged to remonſtrate againſt them: Remonſtrate, I ſay, for various incidents will, no doubt, ariſe in your intercourſe with your parents, wherein you will think you have a juſt title to remonſtrate: But you ought well to conſider, that your parents, in the diſcharge of their duty towards you, have a very difficult taſk to execute. To them it belongs to form and faſhion

your minds and manners, to cultivate the underſtanding, and to regulate the heart; to them it belongs to perform a thouſand little offices, and to put upon you a thouſand little reſtraints, which your green underſtandings will probably diſapprove; but think not from thence, that you have a title to be obſtinate and headſtrong, froward and ſelf-willed. Remember your own dependance, and their ſuperiority.—If you take every opportunity of grieving and thwarting your parents, your conduct becomes a perpetual ſource of uneaſineſs to them; their whole life is a continued ſeries of miſery, and all thoſe comforts, which they had a juſt right to expect and to enjoy from their children, are totally loſt and deſtroyed. Nor is this all, for if you behave with irreverence and diſreſpect to your parents, what opinion will the world form of your temper and diſpoſition? Your conduct, in that caſe, ever becomes a matter of public notice and public rebuke. You ſtamp an image upon your own character, which will not fail

fail in the end to prove very hurtful and prejudicial to your intereſt and happineſs. It will totally deſtroy every other good quality which you may poſſeſs, and render you an object of ſcorn and contempt; and be not ſo raſh and unthinking as to contemn and deſpiſe the opinion of the world. Believe me, it is a matter well worthy of your attention and regard.—The greateſt ſhare of every man's happineſs depends, in a good meaſure, upon the connections which he may form with others. Is it not, then, of high importance that you acquire early ſuch habits, as are moſt likely to ſecure to you theſe connections? Is it not wiſe and prudent in you to adopt ſuch a conduct as may and will recommend you not only to your parents, but to ſociety? To effect, then, this valuable purpoſe, take care to ſubdue all harſhneſs of temper and diſpoſition. Be ready on all occaſions to oblige, and be willing to be obliged. Let modeſty and affability diffuſe itſelf through your whole behaviour; for be aſſured, that the

very firſt ſtudy of all who wiſh to gain the eſteem, and to win the hearts of others, is to learn the ſpeech, and to adopt the manners of candour, of gentleneſs, and humanity.

II. The next duty, which a child is bound to exhibit to his parents, is *Obedience*. You cannot be ignorant, that during the firſt years of your life, you are totally incapable of judging, and of acting for yourſelves. In your infancy you are weak and defenceleſs both in body and mind, and in your childhood little better; your underſtandings are green and imperfect: your minds are totally unfurniſhed with ſuch ideas as are ſuitable to the occaſions which may preſent themſelves to you in life. Is it not, then, highly proper in this ſituation, to be under the guidance and direction of thoſe, who are wiſer than yourſelves? And who are ſo proper to undertake this friendly office, as your parents? They are the moſt faithful counſellors that you can poſſibly have. How many

many inſtances are they daily and hourly giving you of their tender and affectionate regard! How ſincere, and honeſt, and diſintereſted are their inſtructions! How ready and willing to undertake the moſt painful offices on your account, and to give up their eaſe and quiet, and even their pleaſures, for the ſake of making you happy! Can you, then, preſume to throw yourſelves off from this dependance and ſubjection? Dare you venture to break looſe from the reſtraints that are impoſed upon you by nature, and to diſturb the order of Providence? The whole frame and conſtitution of nature remonſtrate againſt it. Conſider, and ſee how the young of all animals are, by nature, committed to the care and protection of their parents. To them they have recourſe on all occaſions for aid and aſſiſtance, for ſuſtenance and ſupport, and conform inſtantly to every intimation of their guides and directors; and can you, who are placed ſo far above them in the ſcale of creation, be ſo unnatural as to oppoſe the authority

of

your parents, and to tranſgreſs thoſe laws which have been eſtabliſhed by the Deity? If you do, your behaviour is prepoſterous in the higheſt degree, and the voice of every creature upon earth cries out againſt you, and condemns you at once both of folly and impiety.

III. The next duty, which I propoſed to recommend to you, is *Attention to the Admonitions and Inſtructions of your Parents.* The advice of a parent has an undoubted claim to your regard, and that for very obvious reaſons. They are of all others peculiarly fitted to be your monitors and adviſers. The affection and love which they bear for you prompt them to conſult on all occaſions your intereſt and happineſs. They are ever contriving the beſt means of promoting your advantage. In this ſingle particular you are in no danger of being miſled by them. Their example, perhaps, may be dangerous, but their advice is always ſafe. However faulty they themſelves may be in their

their conduct, however unwilling to follow the rules which are prescribed by reason and religion, yet they are ever anxious that their children should maintain good characters, are ever solicitous that they should be good men and good citizens. Besides, they are in a peculiar manner qualified to undertake this friendly office; their age and experience enable them to execute it with benefit; they are already acquainted with the pernicious nature and tendency of sin, with the mischiefs and inconveniences which arise from a vicious conduct, are no strangers to the weakness and infirmity of human nature, to the wiles and fallacies of men. By attending, then, to their admonitions and instructions you may become old in counsels, though you are young in years; and let me add, too, that this is the surest method that you can possibly take to recommend yourselves not only to your parents but to society. Virtue is ever amiable in all, but especially in youth, for in them it shines with redoubled lustre. Decency

cency of manners in men of years is nothing more than what we look for and expect: It is the payment, as it were, of a debt; it is the natural reſult of that wiſdom, which is only to be acquired by age and experience. But when we ſee in youth the ſame degree of thought and counſel which we are wont to expect only from old men; when we ſee one, who is but a child in years, paying an exact attention to all the rights and demands of ſociety, we never fail to pronounce him an object of our higheſt eſteem and admiration.

I. Thus far have I gone in endeavouring to point out to you thoſe duties which peculiarly belong to your *Infancy* and *Youth*. I come now to conſider ſuch as are proper to a ſtate of *Manhood*. It is ſuppoſed that you are now arrived at a period of life, when you are got out of the hands of your parents, and have no further need of their aid and aſſiſtance. But think not, that you are now to deſert

ſert them. No; numberleſs are the duties which you are ſtill bound to diſcharge towards them. You are now, as it were, only beginning to repay them the things that they have done for you: For conſider a little, not to mention the many anxious hours and ſleepleſs nights, which they once paſſed on your account; not to mention that endleſs and unremitting care wherewith they watched all your wants, and all your wiſhes; how often did they patiently liſten to your idle and trifling enquiries, and bear with your folly and impertinence! How often did they carry you in their arms, or lead you by the hand, and ſave you from danger! Recollect the numberleſs inſtances wherein they once conſulted your ſafety and happineſs. "Remember all, all indeed you cannot, alas! Ill had been your lot, had not their care of you begun before you could remember any thing, before you could be ſenſible of your own neceſſities, or their kindneſs. Did they not clothe you, before you knew that you were naked?

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and feed you, before you were able to aſk for bread?"* In ſhort, it was the conſtant ſtudy and employment of their whole life to do you ſervice; and will you do nothing now in return for all this? Will you make no recompence for all the benefits and bleſſings which they have conferred on you? Ingratitude is ever conſidered, you know, as one of the baſeſt crimes that can poſſibly inhabit the human breaſt. If a man is unkind to his friend and benefactor, to whom will he be good? The mind that is ungrateful cannot be ſuſceptible of any virtue; and if ingratitude be a crime of ſo high a nature in the common occurrences of life, how great is it from a child to his parent, to whom he owes his life and being, his hopes and happineſs.

How unlike to this was the conduct of a great Theban General,† who, when

* Ogden.

† Epaminondas.

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he had obtained many and ſignal victories over his enemies, wept that his father, to whom he owed ſo much, was not an eye-witneſs of the honours which he had obtained! It is your duty to imitate this example. Let it not be any trouble to you, to beſtow a few thoughts upon thoſe, who never forgot you. Make the beſt return you are able for all the favours which they have, at all times, conferred upon you. Be aſſured, you cannot recompenſe them the things that they have done for you. This is a duty that you may always be paying, but can never diſcharge.

II. Your next buſineſs is to take care of and to ſupport your parents in their extreme old age. This is ſo obvious a part of your duty, that you cannot be at a loſs to diſcern it's propriety. When you firſt came into the world, you were naked and defenceleſs, were deſtitute of every means of ſupport, and totally unfit for

for your own ſecurity and happineſs. In this helpleſs condition, to whom were you indebted for your ſafety and preſervation, but to your parents? And their kindneſs and good offices were never exhauſted; they ſtill purſued you, until they had gradually conducted you to health, and ſtrength, and knowledge.—But no ſooner were you well eſtabliſhed in the world, and had reached in ſome meaſure the perfection of your nature, than your parents begin gradually to decline, and to ſink under the weight of their age and infirmities. They begin to be weak and feeble both in body and mind, —Their limbs fail them, their underſtandings decay; they enter, as it were, into a ſecond childhood, again become infants, and are confined to their beds, as they were once to their cradles; and now is the time for you to exerciſe your compaſſion and tenderneſs in behalf of your aged parents, and to give them proofs of your duty and affection; now is the time

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for you to call forth all your tender aſſiduities, and to lend them that aid and aſſiſtance, which they once ſo liberally beſtowed upon you. You cannot be ſo cruel, as to ſuffer thoſe old limbs to totter and fall to the ground, which have ſo often ſupported and ſaved you from falling. How remarkable are the words of the ſon of Sirach to this purpoſe!—"My ſon, help thy father in his age, "and grieve him not as long as he "liveth; and if his underſtanding fail, "have patience with him and deſpiſe him "not, when thou art in thy full ſtrength. "For the relieving of thy father ſhall not "be forgotten. In the day of thine af-"fliction, it ſhall be remembered; thy "ſins alſo ſhall melt away as the ice in "the fair warm weather." *

I will not preſume even to ſuppoſe, that your parents are in want: They

* Eccl^us. iii. 12.

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muſt not be ſo, while you have any thing to beſtow upon them, although it were acquired by your own labour.—Think it not too much to abridge your own pleaſures, for the ſake of ſupplying their wants; ſacrifice only a few of your follies, in order to make them in ſome degree happy and comfortable. But ſtill there will be wanting ſomething more than even your moſt liberal ſupplies to alleviate their miſeries; and that is, a care and an indulgence, which wealth cannot procure. To you they look up for tokens of kindneſs and reſpect: You are the comfort and delight of their dying eyes, and it is you alone, that are enabled to give them thoſe little ineſtimable proofs of your love, which would loſe all their value, were they to be received from other hands; and be not diſcouraged from diſcharging theſe valuable duties to your parents, by the trouble and inconvenience which may ariſe from it. "They cannot give your patience more exerciſe than you

you once gave their's. Be ever ready to undertake the humbleſt offices for their ſakes, and be pleaſed with the moſt irkſome. They will not live to let you clear your obligations: Pay what you can, you will ſtill be debtors." *

III. The laſt method which I would recommend to you of honouring your parents, is by a virtuous and religious life. This duty it is peculiarly incumbent upon you to diſcharge. It is very obvious, that a ſober, virtuous, and upright conduct "beſides the bleſſings that it is ſure to bring upon your own head, will be a fountain of unfailing comfort to your declining parents, and make the heart of the aged ſing for joy." If you are wiſe and good, they are happy. They reap an ample harveſt for all their former cares and labour, in the piety and proſperity of their ſon. Every pleaſure of life is doubled on their heads; they live in peace and tranqui-

* Ogden.

lity, and at length paſs down to the ſilent manſions of the dead in the fulneſs of content and joy.—On the contrary, if you lead a wicked and profligate life, conſider how much uneaſineſs you create to your parents: Reflect upon the many troubles, the heart-felt ſorrow, and anguiſh of ſoul, which they endure on your account; and let it be well remembered, that you cannot be guilty of greater impiety, than that of grieving your aged parents, "and bringing down their gray hairs with "ſorrow to the grave." *

I have only to add, that if the duties, which I have here recommended to your practice, are of ſuch infinite uſe and importance, let it be your conſtant ſtudy to endeavour to diſcharge them with care and conſcientiouſneſs: Let nothing interrupt you in ſo material a part of your duty: Let neither the cares nor the pleaſures of life ever hinder you from paying,

* Gen. xlii. 38.

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on all occaſions, the beſt ſervices you are able to your parents. All the duties which I have here recommended, are ſuch as you cannot be at a loſs to own and acknowledge: they ariſe from the very frame and conſtitution of your being: They are the duties of nature, of reaſon, and of God.

ON THE

MANNER OF WRITING

A

SERMON.

BRITISH MUSEUM

DISCOURSE XII.

2 TIM. ii. 15.

Study to ſhew thyſelf approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be aſhamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

THE truth and the importance of Chriſtianity, as well as the office and duty of a parochial miniſter, have been ſo often and ſo ably ſet forth by the advocates of our religion, that I am confident I have no need to trouble you, at this time, with a diſcourſe on any of theſe ſubjects. It is an uſeleſs and unneceſſary taſk, to take up the time and attention of ſo well inſtructed

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an audience, in purſuing theſe beaten paths. There is, however, a ſubject ſtill remaining, both new and important, a ſubject which has ſeldom or never been properly conſidered, and which is of conſequence enough to deſerve well the notice of every miniſter of the Goſpel. The ſubject I mean relates to the Manner of writing a Sermon. *

Amongſt the great variety of perſons who are daily ordained to ſerve in the eſtabliſhed church, we cannot but wonder, that ſo very few ſhould be able to

* The Author is here aware that he has laid himſelf open to cenſure, for having thus preſumed to preſent to the public, *in the ſame volume*, Sermons, and Rules for writing Sermons. He who undertakes the office of a teacher, ought certainly to be a tolerable proficient in his own art; and yet this is far more than the Author of theſe Diſcourſes pretends to claim to himſelf: On the contrary, he is ready to acknowledge his own inſufficiency both as a ſcholar and as a writer, and hopes that he ſhall be excuſed for having inſerted this Sermon, as it is ſuppoſed to be addreſſed to very young divines, who have juſt entered upon the paſtoral office.

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diſtinguiſh themſelves in the pulpit.—There is no profeſſion whatever, wherein perſons are ſeldomer found to excel, than in this; and yet the eloquence of the pulpit has many and ſignal advantages over every other ſpecies of oratory. The ſolemnity of the place; the nature of the ſubject; the high and ſublime myſteries which are to be unfolded; the variety of matter to be diſcuſſed; the great and important truths to be enforced: the authority with which a teacher of religion is empowered to ſpeak; theſe and many other particulars of the like nature, far exceed any thing that can poſſibly preſent itſelf at the Bar or the Senate; and yet how few are there amongſt the Engliſh preachers, who are found to excel either as Authors or Orators. Of the rules of Oratory I will not preſume to ſay any thing. * But give me leave to try if I

* Whoever wiſhes to be inſtructed in the rules of oratory, may conſult Rapin's Reflections ſur L'Eloquence de la Chaire, tom. ii. p. 46. or Bruyere, tom. ii. p. 240.

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cannot aſſiſt the young divine in the diſcharge of his duty as a writer. Allow me to offer to his conſideration a few remarks, which I truſt may be of ſome little uſe to him in compoſing his diſcourſes.

The manner and the matter in writing a diſcourſe, has ſeldom been ſufficiently attended to by the teachers of our religion. The Engliſh preacher is ever found to be rational and ſenſible, but his inſtructions are ſeldom conveyed in ſuch a manner as to gain the attention, and to reach the heart. In this he has too often failed; and this failure is attended with the moſt important conſequences; for in vain does the preacher recommend his doctrines to his hearers, "if the word preached, doth "not profit them;" * if it be ſuffered, as it were, to vaniſh in air, or to periſh, like bad ſeed ſown upon the ground, becauſe it hath not ſtrength to bring forth fruit.

* Heb. iv. 2.

Before

Before I begin to offer to your conſideration any remarks of my own, I beg leave juſt to mention the nature and character of thoſe ſermons, which have already been publiſhed. They may not improperly, I think, be divided into three claſſes, namely, ſuch as contain Explanations of Scripture; ſuch as relate to Moral Duties; and ſuch as are addreſſed to the Paſſions. Of the firſt claſs, Dr. Clarke is, perhaps, the only perſon we have, whoſe chief aim and deſign it was to explain the ſcriptures, by comparing ſcripture with ſcripture; and how well he has ſucceeded in this matter, I need not ſay. His ſermons are conſidered as the beſt commentary we have, both upon the Old and the New Teſtament.—As to diſcourſes on Moral Duties, they are innumerable; and well would it have been for religion, if the cure of our corrupted nature had been in any degree proportionate to the antidote.—As to diſcourſes addreſſed to the Paſſions, there are none to be found in the Engliſh language:

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For them we muſt have recourſe to the French ſermons. The Engliſh preacher, as I before obſerved, is always rational and ſenſible, but he has ſeldom ventured to addreſs himſelf to the paſſions. He has generally been content to apply himſelf to the underſtanding, knowing that it is a very nice and difficult taſk to touch the paſſions with ſucceſs; for in this, both language and oratory are required, and theſe in their higheſt perfection.

I. The firſt thing that claims the attention of a Divine, as a writer, is the *Style* of his diſcourſes. It is a great fault in the Engliſh preacher, that he has ſeldom applied himſelf ſufficiently to the ſtudy of his own language: For want of a due knowledge of the ſtyle, in which a ſermon ought to be written, he too often uſes flat and inſipid phraſes, which are extremely tireſome to his hearers. Sermons in general are written in too tame and ſpiritleſs a manner, to be delivered from a pulpit. Whetever is addreſſed to

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an audience, ought, in a certain degree, to have the ſpirit of oratory. The language ſhould have force and energy, and yet ſhould not be turgid and bombaſt.—It ſhould be ſmooth and elegant, and yet ſtrong and nervous. Every word and every ſentence ſhould have it's proper place; * and due care ſhould ever be taken, that your ſentences be not made too long, for this is the ſureſt means that you can poſſibly take to avoid obſcurity, a fault not to be diſpenſed with in compoſition. If you are diſpoſed to uſe metaphors, let them be very rare and judiciouſly choſen; nor ever let your language be overloaded with unmeaning and uſeleſs epithets. Expreſs yourſelves in as ſhort a compaſs as poſſible, while you keep the ſenſe clear. Take care, on all occaſions, "not to multiply words with-"out knowledge."

* Proper words in proper places make the true definition of a ſtyle. SWIFT.

II. It is a very common and a very inexcuſable fault, eſpecially among the younger divines, to make frequent uſe of obſcure terms; by theſe means, they fancy they are ſure to diſplay their ſuperior ingenuity and learning; and yet nothing can be more abſurd than this practice; for has a clergyman any thing to advance before the wiſeſt aſſembly of Chriſtians, which may not be expreſſed in terms equally intelligible to all? When you ſit down to write a diſcourſe, you ſhould ever remember, that you are ſpeaking to perſons, who, for the moſt part, are unſkilled in arts and languages. You ought, therefore, to avoid, as much as poſſible, all obſcure terms, and words of foreign extraction, unleſs cuſtom has made them familiar; and on no occaſion uſe any technical terms, particularly expreſſions taken from logic and metaphyſics; for it is not to be expected, that common hearers ſhould underſtand expreſſions, which are never uſed in common life.

It is true, there are caſes, wherein you may very properly be allowed to deviate from this rule. If you are writing a diſcourſe either with a view of making it public, or with a deſign of delivering it before a learned audience; you are then at full liberty to make uſe of any language you pleaſe; but ſurely a diſcourſe, that is only meant for the middle or lower claſs of people, can never be made too plain.

III. Together with your attention to your ſtyle, you muſt ever be careful to obſerve a *Method* in your writings.—I am well aware, that moſt of our modern preachers, reject the old practice of dividing their diſcourſes into particular heads, as a thing quite obſolete and pedantic; but ſurely a method ſhould ſtill be preſerved. If you do not chuſe to mention the diviſion of your diſcourſe, let the plan and deſign of it be nevertheleſs obvious to your hearers. Without method, no compoſition can ever become

come very valuable. It is this, which enables your audience to liſten with pleaſure, and to think with profit upon your diſcourſes: It is this which enables them to retain, and to carry home with them a great part of your inſtructions, and by a due reflection thereupon, to form and faſhion their minds and manners.

Nor are the benefits which ariſe from hence confined to your hearers only; they equally extend to yourſelves, as writers: Method is the very parent of invention. If you take care to plan your diſcourſe properly, before you begin to write, many thoughts are ſure to riſe out of every head, which did not preſent themſelves upon a general ſurvey of your ſubject. Beſides, when your thoughts are placed in their proper lights, and follow one another in a regular ſeries, they are far more intelligible, and better diſcover their drift and meaning. They give beauty and energy to the whole, and like the

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ſeveral figures in a well diſpoſed picture, receive ornament and grace from each other.

I. Thus far have I gone in conſidering the ſtyle and method of your diſcourſes. I will now paſs on to the *Matter* of them: It is obſervable, that many parochial miniſters, eſpecially thoſe who are diſtinguiſhed by their ingenuity and learning, often perplex their hearers with metaphyſical reaſonings; but ſurely diſcourſes of this nature are very uſeleſs; for how few are there amongſt the bulk of mankind, I might have ſaid among philoſophers and divines, who are capable of judging on theſe abſtruſe and difficult queſtions! Inquiries of this ſort are, for the moſt part, placed far above the reach of human reaſon. It is not to be expected, that your hearers ſhould liſten either with profit or pleaſure, to dark and intricate diſquiſitions, on the eſſence and attributes of the Deity, on the immateriality of the ſoul, on the doctrines of

liberty and neceſſity, on the various and abſtruſe inquiries which have been made, reſpecting the nature and foundation of virtue. Far be it from me, that I ſhould diſcourage any one from making theſe things a part of his private ſtudy and amuſement. It is the buſineſs, it is the duty of every miniſter of the Goſpel to do this. He, who is engaged in the purſuit of any ſort of learning, is well and honourably employed; for although the portion of knowledge, which he is able to obtain, may, in itſelf, be but of little value, yet the purſuit is ſurely uſeful: It exerciſes the underſtanding, and teaches the mind to think, and to reaſon juſtly and accurately.

II. In writing your diſcourſes, it ſhould ever be remembered, that you are ſpeaking to men, who, in general, are unacquainted with theological controverſies, and of courſe are totally unqualified to decide upon them It is your duty, therefore, to avoid, as much as poſſible, every kind

kind of diſpute on the great doctrines of religion: Many of theſe diſputes are fooliſh and frivolous in the higheſt degree: They are quite foreign to the purpoſes of human life, have no tendency whatever to make us either wiſer or better men: Is it not, then, highly improper to engage the time and attention of your congregation in ſuch unprofitable diſquiſitions? If you ſhould, at any time, enter into particular explanations of ſcripture, on points where learned men have differed in opinion, let theſe be propoſed with diffidence and modeſty; but let them not be propoſed at all, if they have the leaſt tendency to unſettle men's minds in regard to the firſt principles of their religion. It has frequently been obſerved of young divines, that immediately upon their entrance on the paſtoral office, they generally begin to inveigh warmly againſt the Atheiſt, the Deiſt, and the Free-thinker, fancying that this is the beſt means they can poſſibly take to recommend themſelves to a

polite congregation; but how injudicious is this conduct! For beſides the very ill compliment which they evidently pay to an audience in attacking them in this way; what benefit, I beſeech you, is likely to reſult from it. Men of this character ſeldom appear in a public aſſembly of Chriſtians; or if they do, is it worth while to trouble a whole congregation, for the ſake of anſwering the frivolous objections of a few fools and fops, who are probably paſt all grace? It is ſurely very imprudent to perplex the minds of well-diſpoſed perſons, with doubts and difficulties, of which they, perhaps, had never before heard a ſingle ſyllable. There are, doubtleſs, many pretenders to free-thinking, who, in reality, are no thinkers at all. They are for the moſt part, nothing better than a ſet of idle and extravagant town rakes, or drunken eſquires of the country, who never think about religion, except to make a jeſt of it. Let me intreat you, then, never to meddle with the objections of unbelievers, for

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let your arguments be ever ſo well founded, they are ſure in the end to beget doubt and diſtruſt, even amongſt men of better diſpoſitions. It is always enough to have theſe objections in your eye, and either to prevent them from riſing in the minds of your hearers, or indirectly to guard againſt them. Let it be your chief aim and endeavour to produce plain arguments, in favour of moral and religious duties. Lay before your hearers the great and fundamental articles of faith and practice: Repreſent to them again and again the folly and danger of ſin, the ſhortneſs and uncertainty of human life, and the ſure and undoubted expectation of a judgment to come. This is the beſt and only means of making your inſtructions really beneficial to your hearers.

III. Modern ſermons are, oftentimes, nothing better than ſhort, and trite, and trifling eſſays on the duties of morality. Believe me, I mean not here to depreciate theſe duties. They are the very guardians of

your peace and proſperity, your hopes and happineſs, but ſurely this is not all that is required from a miniſter of the Goſpel. He ſhould ever bear in mind, that he is a Chriſtian preacher, as well as a preacher of morality. If we believe that Chriſt died for our ſins, and roſe again for our juſtification; if we are convinced that he has eſtabliſhed a new covenant between God and man, has appointed a new means of obtaining remiſſion of ſins, and eternal happineſs, we cannot ſurely neglect to inculcate theſe things upon the minds of our hearers. A Chriſtian preacher ought not to confine himſelf merely to ſuch duties as are common to Jews and Heathens, as well as Chriſtians; he ought rather to point out the great excellency of Chriſtianity, and to ſhew that the duties of morality are heightened and improved by it; and that every one who believes it's doctrines, and obeys it's precepts, is entitled to the bleſſings of heaven.

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What I wiſh, therefore, chiefly to recommend to you, is to regulate the choice of your ſubjects, in ſuch a manner, that the doctrines of Chriſtianity, as well as the duties of morality, may have each their reſpective ſhare in your diſcourſes, and that your hearers may be duly inſtructed in both. Enforce, as much as you pleaſe, the duties of morality; but at the ſame time, neglect not to recommend to them the advantages of Chriſtianity. Warn them not to be barely ſatisfied with the righteouſneſs of a moral Heathen, but to aim at Chriſtian perfection.

IV. There is one thing I muſt not here neglect to recommend to your notice, and which is ſeldom conſidered with that attention which it deſerves. When you ſit down to write a diſcourſe, conſider well to what claſs of men you are about to addreſs yourſelves. All diſcourſes are not proper for all men: Every particular aſſembly of Chriſtians requires a particular mode of edification and inſtruction.—

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There is no need to caution the poor man againſt the dangers of riches, nor the rich man againſt the hardſhips of poverty. You ſhould ever conſider the age, the ſtation, the ability, the profeſſion, the character, the conduct of your hearers, and ſhould ſtudy to make your inſtructions, as far as may be, ſuitable to all. The great Apoſtle tells us, "that "he adminiſtered milk or ſtrong meat "to his hearers, as they were able to bear "it." * It is your duty to follow the ſame example. You ſhould uſe your utmoſt endeavour, that your inſtructions may extend through the whole and every part of your congregation, and like the genial warmth of the Sun, may carry with them life and health wherever they go.

I before obſerved, that our Engliſh ſermons may not improperly be divided into three claſſes, namely, ſuch as contain Explanations of Scripture, ſuch as relate

* 1 Cor. iii. 2.

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to Moral Duties, and ſuch as are addreſſed to the Paſſions. I now affirm, that every good ſermon ought to partake of theſe three different ſpecies, and yet ſhould principally belong to one claſs. If you undertake to explain a piece of ſcripture, you muſt endeavour to apply this ſcripture to the illuſtration and ſupport of moral precepts; or if you are recommending moral duties, they may properly be exemplified from ſcripture; and ſhould always be enforced by the threats and promiſes of the Goſpel. In either caſe, you may frequently find occaſion for a ſhort addreſs to the paſſions;* I ſay, a *ſhort* addreſs, for you ſhould ever beware of letting the pathetic part of your diſcourſe overpower the argumentative. Paſſion ought never to prevail over reaſon: A diſcourſe wholly of the pathetic kind, cannot poſſibly be of any great uſe in directing a Chriſtian

* The argumentative part of your diſcourſe ſhould always ſtand firſt. If you venture to addreſs yourſelves to the Paſſions, ſuch addreſs muſt be artfully prepared, and gradually introduced, and cannot, therefore, come in, very properly, till towards the cloſe of your diſcourſe.

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congregation in the diſcharge of their duty: Beſides, the talent of moving the paſſions ſeldom leaves an impreſſion behind it, that does not "vaniſh away, like "a morning cloud, or as a ſhadow, that "paſſeth by," whilſt a plain and convincing argument may poſſibly operate upon the mind, either of a learned or ignorant audience, as long as they live.

Enough, I think, has been ſaid on the nature of your diſcourſes. Give me leave, now, to paſs on from them to yourſelves, and ſee, what conduct it is proper for you to adopt, in order to qualify yourſelves, in the beſt manner, for the diſcharge of your duty, and to adorn the character you bear.

I. I am willing to ſuppoſe, that there is but little need to exhort you to the purſuit of *Knowledge*; eſpecially as it is an ornament and a defence, without which you muſt neceſſarily appear contemptible both in your public and private cha-

character. A competent portion of learning is abſolutely neceſſary to enable you to make any tolerable appearance in your profeſſion. You ſhould, therefore, ſeize every opportunity of improving yourſelves; and you ought, particularly, to ſtudy the Scriptures daily, that you may be properly qualified to adminiſter ſpiritual food to your hearers. Lay-gentlemen have many advantages over you in the diſpoſal of their time. If they neglect to employ it uſefully, they may yet waſte it without much ſcandal, but you cannot do this. The decency and dignity of your profeſſion will not ſuffer you to be a frequent, ſtill leſs a conſtant companion of their uſual ſports and diſſipations; and well would it be for religion, if the clergy appeared leſs publicly in both, than they commonly do: You ought ever to conſider, that you cannot diſcharge your duty well, without ſtudy, and ſilence, and retirement. You ought uniformly to appropriate a certain portion of every day to reading and contemplation:

plation: If you neglect to do this, that time, which is so bountifully bestowed upon your situation, is sure to haunt you like an evil spirit: It will tease and torment you, till you are forced to find out employment for it, amidst the follies and fashions of the times; for it is well known, that nothing is more insupportable to the imagination, than time still attendant and unoccupied.

II. To your learning and knowledge, must be added, a *sober* and *prudent Behaviour*. In vain do you recommend your doctrines to your hearers, if you yourselves are unwilling to practice them. It is the silent but persuasive admonition of your own example, which is the most powerful requisite to sanctify all your instructions, and to procure them a ready entrance into the hearts of your hearers. Vice and immorality in a minister of the Gospel, are like cowardice in a soldier; he has deserted his post. How highly incumbent, then, is it upon you, to keep your-

yourſelves innocent and unſpotted from the world! For if you, who are teachers of religion, be guilty of groſs and palpable crimes, with what face, or with what propriety can you preſume to inſtruct the flock, over which you preſide; conſcious of your own demerits, you cannot, with any decency, appear in the character of a reformer: You cannot, without much pain aud uneaſineſs, go through the common offices of the church: You cannot, without feeling the ſharpeſt compunction, undertake to correct thoſe vices of which you yourſelves have probably been often guilty.

Nor is it enough, that you are barely virtuous: You muſt take care to have no fellowſhip with the unfruitful workers of iniquity. It is very unbecoming a miniſter of the Goſpel to be intimate with men of looſe principles and profligate manners: You ought ſtrictly to avoid the company of thoſe, who ſcruple not, on any occaſion, to caſt a blot upon

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religion. If you neglect to do this, your ſacred function is ſure to expoſe you to ridicule and contempt: You are ſure to loſe all that eſteem, and reſpect, and reverence, which are the conſtant attendants on a faithful and conſcientious diſcharge of your duty.

Remember, I beſeech you, the ſacred engagement which you ſo ſolemnly contracted with Heaven, when you firſt entered into the miniſtry, of dedicating yourſelves *entirely* to the ſervice of religion; and be aſſured, you will find full employment in the diſcharge of your duty, if you conduct yourſelves as you ought, in ſo important a ſervice. You cannot either neglect, or miſapply your time, without violating, in a very high degree, the ſacred truſt, which you have taken upon you to diſcharge. You are placed as the guides and guardians of the ſouls of men. To you it belongs, therefore, "to "reprove, rebuke, exhort, to be inſtant in "ſeaſon,

"ſeaſon, and out of ſeaſon;" * to endeavour, by every poſſible means, to advance the cauſe of virtue and religion; and ſurely this cannot be done without great pains and care on your part. You muſt be diligent and induſtrious in your calling, and watchful and circumſpect in your behaviour; leſt, having preached to others, you yourſelves ſhould become a "caſtaway." †

* 2 Tim. iv. 2.

† 1 Cor. ix. 27.

The Author begs leave to cloſe this volume, with acknowledging, that, in ſome of the preceding Diſcourſes, particularly in the third, the eleventh, and the twelfth, he has, occaſionally, adopted not only the ſentiments, but the language of other writers.

FINIS.

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